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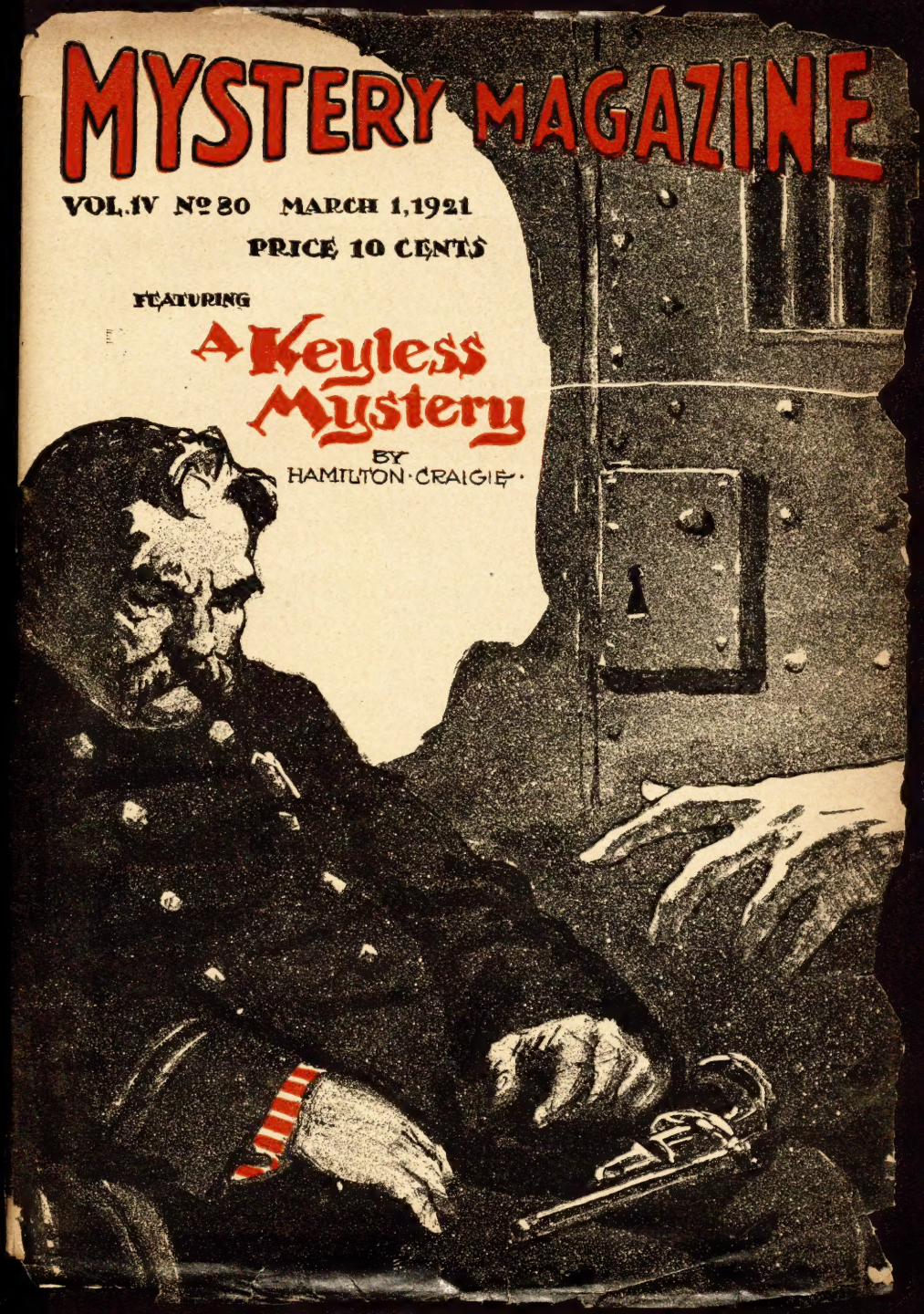
FEATURING

A Keyless Mystery

BY HAMILTON CRAIGIE



"PROFESSOR SATAN," by Chas. F. Oursler, will be the feature story in No. 81

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A KEYLESS MYSTERY

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

CHAPTER ONE

CHIEF ELI BASCOM, of Midvale Junction, flung wide the door of Cell No. 20 with an air, ushering in ahead of him the slim young man in the smart morning suit of dove-gray.

"In here," he ordered shortly, then stepped back, slamming shut the heavy oaken barrier in the face of the prisoner's protestations.

"Mistake, is it?" rumbled Bascom, as he turned the key in the lock. "That's what they all say—now, ain't that so?" he was soliloquizing, his hand on the key, when there came a call from the front office of the temporary jail.

As the chief answered it, behind the locked door the prisoner cast a swift look about him. He was a slim young man with a dark, eager face and long, tapering fingers—fingers that might have belonged to a prestidigitator, a bank clerk—a Jim the Penman, for instance. There might have been something of the caged tiger in his glance as he strode silently to the single window, peering into the sunwashed street without.

No, there would be no egress here—half-inch iron bars, solid, set in flinty cement. He turned away, his roving glance traveling from the puncheon floor to the ceiling, raftered with heavy beams. Ceiling, walls, and window were alike impregnable. And the locked door was of two-inch oak, solid, immovable.

In contrast to his tigerish pacing, a whimsical smile broke about the corners of his mouth.

"The stars in their courses fought against Sisera," he murmured, seating himself upon the solitary chair. The sole remaining article of furniture was an iron bed. For a temporary jail it

was a strong one—as safe, indeed, as if it had boasted a steel door with a patent lock.

For the oak door, a good two inches thick, turned on huge hinges, closing flush with the jamb, save perhaps at the bottom, where there was a clearance between door and threshold of a scant quarter of an inch.

The prisoner hunched forward on the chair, elbows on knees, chin in his cupped palm, in a natural attitude of dejection. Doubtless he was mentally berating his lack of foresight in running foul of the majesty of the law as epitomized in Chief Bascom. But how could he have known that, following an epidemic of petty thieving, the chief had been inoculated with a virus of vigor which had resulted in the prisoner's arrest as a suspicious character, at the least.

For the latter, after registering at the Mansion House, had been discovered by the chambermaid in the room of a certain guest, a traveling salesman who was even then in the act of checking out. All the suspect would say was that it was a "mistake." True—he had taken nothing—but there had been nothing to take; and so——

Now, in durance vile, the young man in dovegray sat hunched forward upon the chair almost, one might have said, like a sprinter upon his mark. He might have posed for Rodkin's Thinker save in the suggestion of a certain leashed energy—a quivering of the muscles about the mouth, almost in the manner of a silent laugh.

He was absolutely without weapon or tool of any sort. They had gone over him with the proverbial fine-tooth comb; they had left him without even a toothpick upon which to meditate, save and excepting a battered corn-cob pipe, a somewhat incongruous adjunct to the impedimenta of so correct a "traveler."

It was imperative that he should win free of that jail, before—before—a worse thing befall.

Suddenly his hand, thrust idly into the pocket of his coat, came out with the one other thing they had suffered him to keep—a newspaper.

He grinned faintly as his eye fell upon the staring head-lines, for they told a story he knew only too well—the story of disgrace, of folly, the old story of high hope and ambition—and at the last oblivion and despair. And if he were to prevent that last act——

He sprang into action. Followed a stealthy rustle, a quick panting, and then the miracle. For he had taken the first step—through the door! The impregnable walls, the raftered ceiling, the impenetrable floor, the grated windows—he had essayed none of these. And behind him as he stood in the empty corridor was the locked door—the heavy, two-inch thick, oaken barrier through which he had made egress like a shadow, armed only with a newspaper and a battered corn-cob. And neither one of these was aught but what it seemed. The newspaper concealed nothing; the pipe was just a pipe, and an empty one. And all that they had found when they had searched him had been a sum of money and some documents and letters which the chief had not as yet found time to examine.

Again that thin ghost of a smile curved his lips.

"Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage!" he hummed lightly under his breath. Then in a trice he stiffened, like a panther about to spring.

Just beyond his line of vision the hallway turned at right angles, and around this turn there sounded voices and approaching footsteps. They were coming. In another moment, five seconds, three, two ticks of the watch, he would be caught —unless—— He recognized the booming voice of the chief.

Across the hall three doors faced him, in one of them a key. A split second before the footsteps turned the corner, with his swift, silent jungle step the young man was across the hall, had turned the key, opened the door, slid in like a swift, silent shadow, and closed it after him. Here again he faced barred windows.

Chief Bascom, accompanied by his deputy, Odle Knapp, came into the corridor.

"A slick one, Odle, I'm tellin' you," the chief was saying, "but we'll give him free board for a while, or I miss my guess. Well, we'll have another look at him anyhow."

He approached No. 20, turned the key, and flung wide the door. The next instant:

"I swan to man!" he roared. "Skipped—by gravy—but how?" Then: "Gentry—Hubbard!" his voice bellowed through the halls.

The two other deputies came running, buckling on their truncheons, wide-eyed, routed from an exciting set-to at checkers for a game somewhat more grimly hazardous if no less exciting.

There were no other prisoners in the jail at the time, and for a moment in the confusion the fact that the prisoner could not possibly have left the building was overlooked. In broad daylight, and with the one entrance to the jail guarded, it would have been an impossible feat even for a Houdini.

"He must be somewhere in the building," averred Bascom, "but he's a desperate man, boys, so—be careful."

But the hunt terminated almost as quickly as it had begun. Two of the "cells" had drawn blank when Hubbard, revolver held high, jerked open the door which hid the prisoner who, at his wavering command of "hands up," faced him with a smile.

"Well, you've got me, boys," he observed pleasantly. "Now, what are you going to do with me?"

Bascom's face, with its flabby jowls, turned a delicate pink.

"That'll be about all from you, young feller," he growled, with a metropolitan assumption of gruffness. He had an uneasy feeling that the prisoner mocked him. There was a something about the latter—a poise, a self-assurance—

which, coupled with his amazing cell-break, conspired to fill the mind of Midvale's chief of police with a vague unease.

Now, as it were, on an impulse he accepted what he felt to be the tacit challenge of this unusual prisoner. He grinned, if with some constraint. "You stay here, son," he commanded, an' I'll gamble you'll stay put—this time. But first we'll just give you the double-O. You Gentry, c'mere."

But though they searched the prisoner with a microscopic thoroughness, they found nothing. They overlooked nothing, from the crown of his head to the soles of his silk-clad feet—and all the time Bascom, at any rate, was conscious of that indefinable something in the prisoner; a quality which somehow escaped him—a fugitive something, a complexity beyond his understanding.

The newspaper thrust in the pocket of the young man's coat they did not touch. It was stale news, anyway. They left the prisoner imperturbably smoking his pipe, charged with some of the chief's own Hazlenut (a nickel for an ounce and a half). And where there is smoke there must be fire. Certainly——

That night, after supper (and Hubbard, detailed to guard the prisoner, watched every mouthful the latter consumed) a sudden alarm from outside brought the prisoner's watch among the rest to investigate. The key had been left in the lock, following a careful examination of the window, for it had been Bascom's idea to leave conditions exactly as they had been as a possible means toward the solution of the mystery.

They found merely a smoldering rubbish heap and a fragment of half-charred newspaper. Oddly enough, the cause of the disturbance was, as it happened, directly beneath the barred window of the prisoner's cell.

The heavy brogans of the guard clumped down the hall; then, after a moment, scraps of talk floated upward—Bascom's voice was heard admonishing Hubbard as the men came into the corridor.

"I tell you, Lige, you had no business leavin' your post. 'Sall right, I reckon—but this here crook, he ain't no common slick, an' you can cotton to that. So we'll just have a look."

With his hand on the knob, his groping fingers paused uncertainly—then, as he fumbled with the key an odd look came in his heavy face, he flung open the door, stepping backward with an oath:

"I—swan—to—man!"

For the room, in the clear evening glow, was bare, empty. As if by a conjurer's trick, in a Satanic confounding of their vigilance, once more the prisoner by some uncanny legerdemain had vanished! Foot-thick walls, beamed ceiling, puncheon floor, oaken portal—locked—had not availed to hold him in duress.

To the men, crowding and peering, shouldering behind their chief, the sense of mystery, like an aura, grew on the night—a whispering seemed to begin and echo; in the hard-held silence, following the startled exclamation of Bascom, the squeal and scurry of rats sounded thinly from the wainscot. In the thick silence one might have sworn to the echo of a taunting laugh out of the dimness—the ghostly echo of an invisible mockery. Then, breaking the spell, the chief growled, deep in his throat:

"A regular Houdini, heh? Well, he can't have gotten out of the building—that's certain."

But in the chief's mind, unvoiced indeed but none the less present, the faint doubt grew. This "slick," this prisoner who was making them all ridiculous—what manner of man was he? And if he passed with such apparent ease at will through barriers which would have defied a behemoth, why had he not taken his freedom when he could?

The chief had not seen, but this much he could vizualize: the slim shadow appearing suddenly in the semi-gloom, as if materialized abruptly from some fourth dimension ready to hand—then melting across the corridor—whither?

Perhaps there was a method in his madness, if it were such—perhaps a certain whimsical bravado. At any rate, the chief assured himself, escape from the building itself was out of the question. But—where was he?

Then Bascom was visited with one of those rare inspirational flashes which in more picturesque idiom are known as "hunches." This "slick" might set them all by the ears; but if that was his intention, why, then——

In two strides Bascom was across the corridor and had flung open the door of Cell 20. Behind him again his retinue gaped in true bucolic fashion; then, in chorus, as with one voice, exclaimed:

"The slick!"

For there, facing them serenely across the threshold of the very cell in which he had first been lodged, sat the young man in dove-gray, arms folded in studied or careless nonchalance—one could not have said which.

"Ah—good evening, gentlemen," he observed, with perfect aplomb. "I am honored."

Bascom's face flushed a dull scarlet. "Now see here, young feller," he began, "don't you try to kid me—you hear? I don't know what your game is, but, by crickey, I'm a-goin' t' find out; an' when I do——"

He left the sentence unfinished, conscious of his audience, the men at his back. No—it would not do to bandy words with the prisoner. Still he must overlook no bets.

"Search him," he commanded briefly, stepping aside as two of his henchmen came forward. "Frisk him proper." Such a procedure seemed scarcely necessary, in view of the previous microscopic examination, but you never could tell. But when the search was finished they had to confess themselves baffled. Absolute zero was the net result, which was just a little less than nothing, and no Kimberley diamond thief was ever

subjected to so thorough and complete a going over.

Bascom stood silent, scowling with an intense and painful concentration. Then, as before, an inspiration from the high gods impinged upon his mental processes. For a moment he had thought of handcuffing the prisoner—of making assurance doubly sure—but his pride, bolstered by the plan which he had suddenly conceived, negatived the suggestion of the shackles. His heavy face glowed with determination. Well, he would try it out, at any rate.

The prisoner was smiling—yet with a hint of something behind the smile that Bascom could not fathom. Well, let it come to a showdown, then, he decided.

"We'll see what we'll see, young feller," he stated crisply, swung shut the heavy door without further parley, turned the key in the lock.

CHAPTER TWO

IN pursuance of his plan, Chief Bascom's preparations were simple. He would leave everything as it had been before the prisoner's first getaway, even to the key in the lock; he would set the stage for his (the prisoner's) confounding—with this difference: he himself would see to it—would watch privily, lynx-eyed—he, Eli Bascom, would be on the job. And he would see what he would see.

His deputies left him seated in a comfortable chair facing the locked door of Cell 20. Better for him perhaps if that chair had not been quite so comfortable, Sybaritic, in fact.

Directly above him a triple cluster of bulbs furnished light aplenty. Fortified with a strong cigar, his heavy service revolver on his knees, he began his vigil. Once and for all he meant to get to the bottom of the mystery—a mystery, he had to confess, beyond anything of which he had ever heard or read.

The facts were simple, and yet, if he had not known that they were facts, he would have believed himself the victim of a nightmare, an illusion, a hypnosis as weird as the Indian conjurer's trick of the vanishing ladder.

First, then, a prisoner, unarmed, lacking the simplest tool—thick walls—heavily barred windows—a door massive, ponderous, as hermetically sealed as a fly in a vacuum—it was amazing, it was unbelievable, it was altogether unreasonable that this helpless prisoner could have made his escape, not once merely, but twice, and under the same conditions.

The chief dismissed the theory of collusion—his deputies he had known since childhood; they were proved men, all of them.

It was a problem to make a man gray-headed—it was—it was——

The chief was tired—he had had a somewhat strenuous day. The minutes had merged into hours—his cigar had gone out—the silence and the night seemed to close down upon him in an enervating flood. He nodded, caught himself with a jerk. This would never do. What time was it getting to be, anyway? The slow ticking of the hall-clock, like the beating of a heart, rose in the silence to a sort of muffled thunder, then died, lapsed. Where had he been?

He came to himself with a start, to stare bemusedly at a shadowy figure, looming like a gray ghost out of the shadows. He had heard no sound. He had had no warning—that he could understand. Now, as he faced the business end of his own revolver in the hand of the young man in dove-gray, Chief Bascom gaped, like a hooked fish. Under the cold sheen of the lights his face took on a greenish-gray pallor.

"Wha-wassamatter?" he articulated foolishly.

"Quiet!" came the sharp, admonitory whisper. Then: "Get up—and be quick about it!"

The chief arose with a shiver. The corridor was chill, with a damp, tomb-like savor; the night had advanced—that was it. Bascom was a brave man, but there was a something in the cold eye of his captor which gave him pause. The "Slick" had beaten them again—how, it was not his to speculate. The mystery of the prison that was yet not a prison remained a mystery, but in the dank silence of the night it assumed a something formidable—the daunting implication of the Unknown.

"Wha—what do ye want, mister?" said Bascom spiritlessly.

"I want you, old socks." For the first time a tight-lipped grin appeared on the other's face. "Step lively now," and he pointed with his hand in the direction of Cell No. 20. "But—just a minute." The fingers of his free hand, in a lightning "frisk," had thrust beneath Bascom's coat, to come away presently with a flat package of papers circled with a rubber band which a lightning appraisal assured him were his own.

Bascom's eye followed the direction of the pointing finger, and saw that the door stood open—waiting. He glanced at the revolver in the hand of the ex-prisoner, and with a groan that epitomized his dejection, passed through the door into the cell.

The victor in this queer duel leaned a moment against the jam.

"A dead open-and-shut proposition, eh, Chief?" he grinned companionably. "Well—I must be going—for good, this time—but—meditate on this, old top"—again the whimsical smile twitched the firm mouth—"but that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold; but listen just a moment. His eye hardened and his voice held a sudden, savage ring:

"If you make a sound, an outcry in the next five minutes I'll come back—and you won't ever—get me, old-timer?"

But even as he spoke there was a look in his eye

which, if Chief Eli Bascom could have read it, belied the seeming viciousness of his tone. Anyway, the door was practically sound-proof (the deputies slept on the floor above) and the chief would be effectually gagged, too, as his quondam prisoner shrewdly suspected, by his pride, which, for a time at least, would stifle any temptation to call out. Anyway, it made little difference. There was no further need for his theatrical exits and entrances—these had served their purpose, which was the confusion of his jailers, until he could recover those incriminating and identifying documents. Darkness was now all that he needed—darkness and a little time.

The heavy door closed on the Chief of Police of Midvale Junction—the key turned in the lock—and the prisoner, a prisoner no longer, passing swiftly down the corridor, fumbled a moment with the catch of the front door, opened it, closed it softly after him and was gone into the odorous darkness of the summer night.

CHAPTER THREE

LOCKED in thus ignominiously by his erstwhile prisoner, Chief Bascom, having exhausted after a time a rather extensive vocabulary of protest, was struck by another idea, this time, however, of no particular originality.

His pride, rather than his fear of the prisoner's threat, had kept him silent—for a time at least—and when at length he raised his voice in a belated call for assistance, his realization that the walls were practically sound-proof, added to the fact that his deputies were sleeping above-stairs in a distant wing, stopped his cries even as uttered. And at that hour, eleven in the evening, there would be no passersby to hear.

It was then that in the development of his idea he began a painstaking exploration of the floor and walls with his pocket flash. But walls and floor furnished him not the slightest clue—the heavy door presented to him merely the blank surface of a very tangible barrier.

Exit from this very practical prison was beyond him, in more senses than one. But what man has done man can do. He strove to put himself in the prisoner's place, just as the celebrated detectives of fiction were wont to do; he knit his brows; he canvassed every possible and impossible method of which the prisoner might have availed himself. But to no purpose.

"Why the thing's impossible!" he muttered. And yet it had been done—it was a fact accomplished.

The chief slumped downward dejectedly into the one chair when a sound from without brought him up standing, to pound on the door and shout loudly for release.

A voice answered him, tinged with surprise and wonder.

"That you, Chief? Say!"

"Judas priest—yes! Open up—will you—open up!"

And presently there came a click—the door swung open, disclosing Gentry, eyes wide, one hand caressing his jaw.

"Well, I'll be——" the deputy was beginning when chief Bascom cut him short:

"Demmit, don't stand starin' at me like a gallawumpus, Sam. Got y'r gun on y'?"

And at Gentry's affirmative he snapped: "Nearly twelve. We got no time t' lose—never mind 'bout the others. We'll take the Post Road; he'd have t' go that way."

Then, as the two passed out of the jail, he was mumbling: "I swan t' man, you fellers sleep like dead ones, but—a toothache's good f'r something, after all, else I reckon I'd 'a' been in there till sun-up. Shake a leg now."

CHAPTER FOUR

LIKE a gray ghost the slim young man, leaving behind him the dim bulk of the jail, drifted with his swift jungle step across the village square. Nothing and nobody appeared to be stirring, and in a moment he had left the town behind, and, true to the prediction of the chief, had struck into the Post Road.

As he went a thought found utterance in muttered speech—the very words, strangely enough, that the chief himself had used to Gentry:

"He'd have to go that way."

With this cryptic utterance, the ex-prisoner swung off up the dusty roadway at a racing clip, reeling off the miles with the effortless ease of an athlete in training, which perhaps he was. Ten miles of this he had covered probably—he had met no one—the road was a lonely one—he was a bit fagged, principally from loss of sleep. On either side of the road the timber closed in like a wall; that was what the chief had meant when he had said that the fugitive would take to the Post Road. And it was twenty miles from Midvale to the nearest railroad.

A full moon had kept him company all the way, and now, as he topped a slight rise, he saw just ahead the dim outline of a jumble of buildings—a farmsteading set back a little way from the pike itself.

It was hard upon midnight as he turned in at the gate at about the same hour that Gentry had found and released his superior officer. The farmhouse was still, silent, with the heavy silence of a house of toil after the day's labor. However, at the traveler's knock a light sprang up—there came a fumbling at the bolt—the door opened, and a face peered forth, sharp, vulpine in the moonlight.

"Can you put me up for the night—or what's left of it?" queried the traveler.

Curiously enough, the farmer did not appear disgruntled at being disturbed at such an hour. And strangely enough also, after a single sharp scrutiny of the traveler's face, there were none of the customary hems and haws in his reply:

"Reckon I kin, mister," he made answer, "but it'll cost ye all of thirty cents."

"Oh, fine," agreed the young man. "We won't quarrel over the price. I'll make it a dollar—how's that?"

But he had missed entirely the sudden, shrewd look in the farmer's face—a look of blended surprise and recognition; a calculating look; a look of appraisal—and of something more.

"Right this way, mister," he said, preceding his transient lodger to a room on the top floor, where, after bidding him good-night, he left him to his own devices.

The house was a lonely one, on a lonely road. As the young man made ready for bed a rising wind began to murmur among the pines, like the voices of uneasy ghosts. And now that he thought of it, there had been a something in the farmer's manner—an—an eagerness—that was it.

But the young man in gray smiled grimly to himself as he deposited his coat over the back of a chair, loosened his collar and cravat, and lay down on the bed. That was the extent of his preparations.

An hour passed—while the moon rose higher on her westering wheel above the silvered roofs—when the stair creaked as if under the pressure of a careful footfall, a sighing breath stole upward, there came a faint click, and a sudden draft stole through the room, pattering in the dark like the feet of an invisible army of the dead.

A shapeless something, like a monstrous crab, sidled toward the bed, a hand reached up, thrust into the pocket of the coat on the chair, came away with something that crackled faintly, then was gone.

Again there came that sighing breath of air—then the faint click. Silence.

The figure on the bed awoke to sudden life, vaulted onto the floor, laid his hand upon the door-knob, gave it one quick, silent turn.

"Locked in, by thunder!" he whispered between his teeth.

CHAPTER FIVE

ELI BASCOM and the deputy, Gentry, came to a halt before the farmhouse whose shuttered windows stared back at them like blind eyes under the moon. The chief, who was driving, eased the wheezing roadster to a stop, climbed out, and with a nod to Gentry approached the house.

Following his knock, the chief might have counted ten slow seconds before the door opened, and the fox-like visage of the farmer, Obadiah Hardacre, looked forth.

"We're right down sorry to disturb ye, Obe," prefaced Bascom, "but th' fact is, we're trailin' a wanted man—tall feller—slick as they make 'em—smooth as ile—gray suit—smooth-shaven. Thought mebbe he might ha' paid ye a visit."

The farmer did not look like a man hastily awakened; the brightness of his eye, just now with an odd flame in its depths, would have given the lie to an assumption of sleepiness. And he was far too shrewd to feign this, even to Bascom.

"We-el, now, Eli, f'r a happenstance I ben up tendin' a sick calf—no, there ain't nobuddy even passed—no, sir—'r I'd 'a' seen him, certain sure."

"Shucks, now, that's too bad—it is, for a fact," said Bascom, but there was no apparent irony in his tone. "That's a mite too bad. Well—thankee, Obe—'pears we're barkin' up th' wrong tree. G'night—much 'bleeged—hope th' calf's feelin' peart come sun-up.'

He drove off up the road in a rattle of machinery about a hundred yards, where a fork crossed it at right angles. Then he slowed, turned to Gentry swiftly:

His eyes, Sam—notice his eyes? They was bright as buttons. Sick calf! Well, I dunno—we'll just go back an' have a look—see."

Running the car into a clump of bushes by the roadside, the two stole backward under cover of the woods, which spread along the pike on either side, an inky wall under the moon.

But as they came opposite the house, for a brief interval the cover thinned, so that they were outlined for perhaps a split second in the white radiance. But the house as before showed blank, silent, dead.

"They do say th' peg-leg ghost's been seen on th' pike lately," volunteered Gentry in a nervous whisper, and Bascom was turning on him with a sort of mingled nervousness and disgust, when a high, wavering call split the silence abruptly at their backs.

For a second both men froze—then Bascom hissed:

"Loon—durn ye—an' that's what ye be!" The lake's full of 'em—but I'm goin' t' have a look first an' last. C'mon."

With the deputy at his heels Bascom crossed the road and set up a thunderous rapping at the door.

At first there was no answer; then a shuffling step approached the door—there followed the rasp of a bolt—the door slid open a crack, and a beady eye surveyed them through the opening.

"Open up, Obadiah!" came the voice of Bascom, this time cold and incisive. "Open up—in the name of the law!"

The door swung wide, revealing the cadaverous figure of the farmer, his face a curious blend of surprise, trepidation, and startled guilt.

"I dunno whut y're drivin' at, Eli Bascom," he quavered, "but if ye put it that way—come in—come in."

The men stepped through the door, Bascom os-

tentatiously holding his revolver in his hand. A single, sputtering oil lamp cast monstrous shadows to right and left as the two men entered. Bascom wasted no time in preliminaries.

"We're a-goin' t' search this house, Obadiah Hardacre, f'r I suspicion ye know more about this matter than ye'll tell."

The farmer's protestations were in vain. He could only follow the officers as they moved from room to room, Bascom, with his flash, in advance, the farmer, between him and Gentry, holding the lamp. For Hardacre knew but too well what the result would be, and at the thought a panic desperation seized him.

From the moment he had seen the fugitive's face he had been sure of his man (hadn't the description tallied perfectly—Osborne, the absconding cashier of the Thirteenth National?) and the papers he had abstracted from the young man's coat had practically proved it: correspondence on the bank's letterhead; bonds; even a letter addressed to Osborne himself.

And as he followed the two officers a dozen plans, a dozen expedients were born and rejected in his brain.

They had combed over the first and second floors, investigated the cellar, and now, at the head of the attic flight, they had paused before the room in which Hardacre had locked the fugitive. A hoarse croak rather than a voice issued from the farmer's throat:

"Eli—Sam—boys—he ain't there—I tell ye—I seen him goin' down th' pike—cross my heart an' liver—I——"

"Shet up—you—crook!" growled Bascom. "I always knew there was somethin' wrong with you—c'mon here—open up now."

There was nothing for it. Hardacre advanced, his face a sullen mask, holding the lamp high. For a moment, perhaps, he was minded to hurl it in their faces and escape, if he could, but doubtless he lacked the hardihood of his desires. So it might have been.

Blindly he turned the key in the lock, but it resisted him stubbornly. "Why—why——" he was beginning—then laid his hand upon the knob.

"It's—it's unlocked!" he gasped, half to himself.

Impatient, Bascom gave it a vigorous shove; it flew open, thudding with an empty sound against the wall.

The three men fell back a pace, in blended astonishment, relief, chagrin. For the room was empty. Again the wizard who mocked at bolts and bars had vanished from his prison-house. Hardacre found his voice first:

"Well—well—y'see—there ain't no one here!" he cackled uncertainly, yet in his heart there grew a great wonder, and with a daunting apprehension. In his bewilderment he almost betrayed himself, if he had not done so before.

"He—he's gone—past the house—he must have—just as I told ye, by cracky!" he exclaimed. But Bascom turned on him sternly:

"I dunno 'bout this, Obadiah Hardacre. There ain't no one here—that's certain—but—it's mighty queer—it is, for a fact." He bent upon Hardacre a menacing scowl. "The fact—by your own confession—that you saw the man—an' deceived an officer of the law in the discharge of his duty 'd be enough f'r me to arrest ye."

He paused; then, explosively: "Ye say ye saw him goin' up th' pike. How'd ye know he was th' man we was after?"

Hardacre preserved a sullen silence. For a moment Bascom seemed of two minds—then, with a parting injunction to "step mighty keerful," he left the house, Gentry at his heels.

CHAPTER SIX

THE fugitive, at the moment he had discovered the significant evidence of the locked door, had wasted no time. He could imagine well enough what was going on in the farmer's mind: his cupidity, heightened by the evidence of the papers and the hope of himself collecting the reward, had been responsible for the locked door and his later evasion to the constables.

The fugitive, of course, knew nothing of this last, but—a quick glance out of the one window had shown him, as in the sudden stoppage of a cinematograph, the ink-black silhouettes of Bascom and the deputy. The papers—well, he would recover them in due time, he reflected, with a tight little grin. There could be no doubt of that.

Meanwhile——

Once again there came a stealthy rustle—a thud—a click—the fugitive, helpless as before, guiltless of pen or pencil, knife or key, save that he now was the possessor of a heavy, blue-steel revolver—had passed like a shadow out of the room, across the narrow hall, and even as Bascom and his dog Tray thundered at the door, had crossed to the room opposite, opened the window noiselessly, slid down the drain-pipe like a steeplejack—and was gone like a gray ghost, indeed, across the farmyard and into the timber.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE little white farmhouse, set like a jewel in a pale-green velvet setting of lush meadow, dreamed under a magic moon. And out of the encircling wall of forest, converging upon it from different directions, were five men—five actors in a tragic masque: hare, fox, and hounds—but just now, if they had known it, hunters and quarry queerly reversed—a hare with teeth and a fox who followed rather than led.

The man with the livid face, unshaven, un-

kempt the more for the very disorder of his expensive garments, was the first to reach the farmhouse. At a signal against a window he waited in a fever of impatience, his glance darting all ways at once, until, with a soft snick, the window went up—a white hand beckoned—and he had vaulted over the sill.

A light sprang up—and against the drawn shade appeared two wavering silhouettes: a man and a woman—which met and blended into one.

The watcher from the edge of the meadow shifted his gun from his left hand to his right and went forward noiselessly over the lush grass. This was the young man in dove-gray, himself serenely unaware of the two pairs of eyes which had kept both himself and the clandestine visitor in view from the moment of their appearance into the open.

Bascom and Gentry had picked up his trail in the dust of the roadway, following it from the farmyard, sharp and clear in the moon, and pointing eloquently to the woods. And behind them all a face, lean, vulpine, with its goat's whiskers, like an aged and leering half-satyr, half-gargoyle, had observed all four.

The fugitive, the jail breaker, the young man in the gray suit—amateur Houdini, embezzler, what-not—was approaching the house. Desperate he might have been—certainly his purpose was clear to the watchers at his back, straining like hounds against the leash.

"We got 'em, by gum—th' two on 'em, mebbe, Sam!" exulted Bascom in a stage whisper, as a darkened window adjacent to the lighted square went up silently, and the slim figure, like a shadow, was gone over the sill. Guns in hand, the stalkers of the law went toward the house—and behind them, like a hungry cat, that other lean, swift, silent shape, with its hawksbill nose and predatory mouth.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WITHIN the house tragedy or the elements thereof marched to their final consummation. To the white-lipped girl facing the unkempt figure across the kitchen table-top it seemed to linger in the air in a manifestation of wordless menace. Upon the table was a wallet—thick, heavy, banded with a broad rubber clasp.

"Jim—Jim—you shouldn't have come here—and all that money! Suppose—just suppose——"

"I'm not supposing, Florence," returned the man wearily. "It's almost all there—thirty thousand—less about three hundred."

He bowed his head on his cupped palm, and the woman gazed at him with a look in which was blended fear, pity, and a love unutterable. After an interval the man raised his head, his face haggard, his mouth twitching. Every little while he would turn his head from right to left, listening, peering over his shoulder into the odorous dark beyond the pale circle of the light.

"I tell you, Florence, it's been plain hell, and no mistake!" he burst out. "Every face a question-mark—every glance an accusation. God! I've turned and doubled like a fox. They almost got me at the Mansion House. I got away just in time. There was some 'strong-arm' trailing me, I think. I'm sick, I tell you: body and mind—and now——"

"And now," she finished for him softly, "it's ended, isn't it, Jim—Jim, dear—it's——"

"Ended—yes, Florence," he cut in bitterly. "It was for you I took the money, but I'm blaming nobody but myself. I'll go back—and take my medicine."

"But—oh, Jim—just suppose," began the girl again, "suppose—that's a lot of money—just suppose some one had seen——"

She broke off abruptly, with a gasp, her eyes, wide with terror, gazing past her husband in a hypnosis of startled fear. He, one hand covering the wallet, the other darting to his hip, wheeled in his chair, but his hand fell to his side, his face a grim, ironic mask, as a voice, dry, cold, like a cutting wind, echoed at his back:

"That's right—put 'em up—and keep 'em there—thanks!"

And the young man in dove-gray advanced into the room, pistol in hand.

The man at the table turned, gave one searching look at the face of the intruder, then slumped inertly in his seat, his face gray, his eyes staring straight before him with the bitterness of death.

This was the capsheaf of his folly indeed—the crowning irony! He had repented—too late! These must have been his thoughts, for, embezzler that he had been, he must now so remain; restitution—the money—it was taken out of his hands, in very truth, even as the stern figure holding the balance of power reached forward with his free hand to take the wallet.

Instead, however, he added one more amazing act to the happenings of this most amazing night. Stepping back a pace——

"I should prefer that you give it to me, Osborne," he said quietly.

The man seated at the table looked—then looked again—and a curious swift mingling of surprise, consternation, shame, and a wild wonder passed over his face.

"You!" he exclaimed.

The intruder pocketed his gun with one swift motion, and stepped forward to the table. Wordlessly, Osborne handed over the wallet—without protest—turning a tragic face upon his wife, yet somehow calm, set, steadfast with purpose.

"It might as well have been a thief," remarked the young man in gray, and Osborne, wincing at the word, stared at his fingers, spread out before him—then lifted his head.

"It's all there except—except about three hundred—I—I'm—glad."

The man in gray spoke brusquely, as if to hide a sudden emotion:

"I nearly reached you at the hotel, Osborne—you just did make it in time—and then"—he smiled whimsically—"some country sleuths laid me by the heels as a suspicious character. I must have looked it, I guess. But I don't think they connected me with you—although Farmer Hardacre, I think, was more than suspicious. I was pretty certain you'd make for home. Funny, though, Hardacre's not suspecting you; but—well, you didn't ask him for a lodging for the night, or he might have."

For a moment the three gazed at each other in a strained silence. Then:

"Well, I'm ready whenever you are," said Osborne, dully. He rose slowly, heavily, in his eyes the look of a man who envisages the bleakness of a future without hope.

"Well, I'm glad—I'll take my medicine," he went on, his tone lifeless, dead.

The young man in dove-gray glanced at him sharply. Then he said softly:

"You've a wife, Jim—you mustn't forget that, you know. You've carried a little private hell around with you for some time past, I dare say—and I don't imagine you'll forget——"

He paused. They gazed at him in startled wonder—but the girl, with a surer instinct, understood.

"You mean?" she cried, in her tone a hint of tears and laughter.

The young man in dove-gray paused again, looked away—glanced for a moment at the girl—then continued briskly:

"I mean—we'll just charge that three hundred to profit and loss—or—pay it back—when you can."

At the girl's almost hysterical thanks he paused again, for the first time embarrassed. "Not a word—please—don't," he said softly. "I'm the doctor." Then, with an abrupt changing of the subject:

"Well, I gave them something to think about, at any rate—perhaps you'd like to know how I fooled them. Well, just a little trick I picked up, no matter where."

To the tale of his several escapes they lent a respectful if almost incredulous ear. "But—but—I don't understand," queried the girl. "You say you had—say you had nothing—no tool?"

"Well, just a minute," replied the young man in gray, with a smile. "The demonstration's the thing. Now—watch—that pantry door. As you see, I have nothing but this newspaper, and—this corncob pipe—smells to heaven, I admit. Now, watch that pantry door."

His manner was again whimsical, easy. He took the gun out of his pocket, laid it on the table. "You see, I haven't a thing in the way of a tool; and the jam that it makes is a thing to adore—and that's a riddle, if you want to know—but—here goes."

The door closed after him. Then they heard his voice, muffled:

"Lock the door, please."

Osborne rose, turned the key in the lock, and the two, man and girl, watched, curiously intent.

For a moment nothing happened. And as they gazed, others, too, watched, unseen, the culmination of the play. If they had looked behind them they would have seen the faces pressed against the pane—eager, wondering, exultant. And then——

Again the rustle, the click—before their eyes a white square slid out from underneath the door—the key trembled—hung—fell outward with a soft thud upon the newspaper. Then, even as they watched, the newspaper disappeared, drawn backward beneath the door. With it went the key. There came the click of the turning lock—the door swung wide.

"I—swan—to—man!"

Bascom and Gentry, followed by Farmer Hardacre, strode into the room. That was as far as they were to go.

The young man in dove-gray turned upon them brusquely. In his hand he twirled the pipe-stem which he had used as a "pusher" for the key.

"No, gentlemen—I'm sorry—but we don't need you—really. If you are inclined to doubt, Mr. Osborne here will tell you who I am, which the documents now in possession of Mr. Hardacre, and this photograph"—he held out to them the newspaper—"will verify, I believe."

Osborne turned stiffly "This is Mr. Robert Tracey, Vice-President of the Thirteenth National," he proclaimed. "I——" Then speech failed him.

Bascom and Gentry, their faces a study in chagrin, turned to where in the background hovered the farmer, his mouth agape, his fallen countenance registering a deep shade of gloom. He came forward guiltily, laid the papers on the table—then——

"You—get outa here," bellowed Midvale's chief of police, then, after a quick glance at the newspaper likeness and a cursory examination of the documents, and mumbling, apologetic abject: "I guess that's all right, Mr.—er—Tracey—we—I—know Mrs. Osborne—it's all right, I guess," he departed, followed by his deputy.

Tracey turned to Osborne with a smile which included the girl.

"Simple, wasn't it?" he said. "I forgot to pay that farmer a dollar I owe him—well, no matter. If Bascom hadn't wanted to test out my little stunt, I might be there yet. Well, he did—and I'm here, so it's all right. Anyway, it'll give 'em something to talk about."

Then the three broke into laughter—Osborne shakily, the girl tremulously, Tracey with a good heart, as there came to them out of the night, amid a mumble of voices, the words—at once a commentary and conclusion:

"I swan to man!"

An Accusing Conscience

BY MYRTLE K. ARNOLD

SUMMONED by telegraph to the town of Cornwall, Detective Jim Reid left New York in the evening, and reached the town at ten in the morning by the Pennsylvania route.

When he stepped from the train he found an automobile waiting, ready to convey him to the residence of Mrs. Amelia Hastings, a widow lady, who was the relict of a wealthy wine merchant.

Mrs. Hastings had telegraphed to the detective agency, asking that an expert be sent to her, but she did not, as may be supposed, state the nature of the case.

A short ride transported him to the residence of the lady, which was situated in the suburbs of the town, and he was at once ushered into her presence.

At the first glance Mrs. Hastings impressed one favorably. She was a still attractive and well-preserved lady, on the sunny side of thirty-five.

Without much preliminary talk they came to the business for which Reid had been summoned.

"You are to investigate a case of mysterious disappearance," the lady began; and then, in answer to questions and her own voluntary narration the following case came out:

The lady's brother, Jerome Lake, a young man of twenty-four, had resided with her ever since the death of her husband. Several days previous he had mysteriously disappeared. No trace of him could be discovered, and what was remarkable was that no one had seen him leave the house for several days before he vanished.

Indeed he had been confined to the house by an attack of nervous headache, to which he was subject. None of the young man's belongings were missing, and a pocketbook containing $100.00—all the money he was known to have in his possession—was found in his writing-desk. It was evident that, if he intended to leave the place, he would have taken the money with him.

Mrs. Hastings assured Reid that her brother had not spoken of absenting himself from home, and that he was daily expecting a visit from a gentleman friend, whom he was anxious to meet. She hesitated to say that she believed her brother had become the victim of foul play.

Jim questioned her closely, but she said she knew of no one who was his enemy, or of any reason why any one should wish to injure him. It seemed that no one would profit by his death.

The case was a puzzle, and the detective found himself absolutely without a clue to the mystery of the young man's strange disappearance.

All the neighborhood was carefully searched. The river and a neighboring pond were dragged, but the investigation resulted in no discovery.

The conductors of the railway trains and the station men were next interviewed, and they were positive that Jerome Lake had not been a passenger on any out-going train for months.

A week's work, and still Jim had no news to communicate to the anxious sister regarding her brother.

As a dernier resort, Reid had turned his attention to the members of Mrs. Hasting's household. Each of them became the object in turn of surveillance and study.

There were two maid-servants, the gardener and his wife, and a chauffeur, besides a young woman who was a sort of companion to the widow, and not treated exactly as a servant, although she received a salary.

The two maids, the gardener and his wife, as well as the chauffeur were soon mentally placed beyond the pale of suspicion.

The companion, however, puzzled the officer.

She was a young woman of twenty-two or three, finely formed and prepossessing; but there was a certain look in her flashing black eyes that Jim did not like, and he could never get her to meet his glance directly. The detective came to the conclusion, from a careful study of her character, as far as it was developed, that the companion—whose name, by the way, was Virginia Matland—was the possessor of a vindictive and revengeful nature, and that, under certain circumstances, she would be a dangerous person.

The thought occurred to Reid that so attractive a girl might have been the recipient of attentions from the missing young man. He broached the subject, in a cautious way, to Mrs. Hastings, but she at once convinced Jim that he was off the track.

Jerome never liked Virginia Matland, and had never paid her the least lover-like attention; and indeed there seemed to be a mutual repugnance existing between him and the lady companion. So, at least, Mrs. Hastings assured Reid.

Further, the sister of the missing man said that her brother was engaged to an estimable young lady in the neighborhood, who was quite distracted over his mysterious disappearance.

Notwithstanding all this, Jim could not get over a suspicion that had taken possession of his mind, that the companion was in some way concerned in the disappearance of Jerome Lake.

The premonition was one of those inexplicable evidences of the guilt of a party which it concerned, to which Reid had more than once in his career been indebted to success.

The past had convinced Jim that those premonitions were never meaningless.

One night he retired rather early to his room in Mrs. Hasting's house, and had thrown himself upon a couch without removing his apparel, intending to remain thus but a short time. The detective's mind was busy with the case in hand, but at last he fell asleep and had a strange dream. He fancied he saw Virginia Matland standing over the body of Jerome Lake.

Mrs. Hastings had of course given the officer a picture of the missing man, and in his sleep he recognized him at once. Reid awoke with a start, and so realistic had his dream been that he could scarcely convince himself that it was only a dream. He strode to the window.

It was a bright moonlight night, and consulting his watch he found that it was after eleven o'clock.

Suddenly he saw a shadowy form glide from the house.

The form was that of a woman—the woman of his dream—Virginia Matland. The detective stole down the stairs to the front door, which he found open, and followed the woman. She led him to a grove at the end of the grounds, where she came to a halt beneath a large tree, from behind which stepped a masked man.

"I suppose you are the author of the mysterious note, without a signature, which I received to-day, bidding me to meet you here, or fear dreadful consequences. Now, who are you?" demanded the woman, fearlessly.

"Who am I?" replied the man. "Guess."

At the sound of his voice the woman started back as though suddenly overcome with terror.

"You shall know who I am," the masked man went on.

The next instant he snatched off his mask.

"I am Edgar Reeves, the man you would have murdered!" he cried.

The girl uttered one awful cry and fled toward the house, and as she passed Reid's place of concealment he heard her gasp:

"Who, then, did I kill?"

When she was gone the man was about to depart, when Jim placed his hand on his shoulder, and covered him with an automatic.

"I arrest you!" he said, and before he knew what was up, Jim had the handcuffs on him.

"Now, sir, you can only save yourself from prison by an explanation. I am a detective, and I believe you are concerned in the fate of Jerome Lake," said the detective.

The young man was frightened.

"I will tell you," he said. "I was betrothed to Virginia Matland; but found out that she had poisoned her old uncle in order to secure a paltry four hundred dollars, and I broke the engagement.

"Virginia was terribly angry, and one day—the very day of Jerome Lake's disappearance, as I have heard—she made an appointment to meet me in the deserted wing of Mrs. Hastings's house, late at night, saying that she had something particularly important to say to me before we parted forever.

"I failed to keep the appointment; and now I believe that by some fatality Jerome Lake went to our rendezvous, and that Virginia mistook him for me and killed him.

"We are nearly of the same size, and, as you see, there is some resemblance in our faces."

This was young Reeves' explanation. Reid believed him; and, having obtained his promise to maintain the most profound secrecy regarding what had transpired, Jim released him and permitted him to depart.

Returning to his room, he secured a flashlight.

He was just about to leave the apartment when he heard a footstep in the hall, and listened intently.

The steps passed Jim's door, and a moment later he heard them from the direction of the deserted wing.

Peeping from the door, which he gently opened, he saw Virginia Matland hurrying along the hall in the direction of the unused part of the house, where she had asked her former lover, young Reeves, to meet her the night of Jerome Lake's mysterious disappearance. The detective began to feel that he was on the eve of a great discovery, but knew that all depended on his own skill now. Were he to alarm the suspected woman she would be forearmed, and the solution of the mystery would be rendered more difficult than ever. He stole very cautiously out of his room, having first removed his shoes and turned off the light.

Virginia Matland never glanced behind her until she reached the door of the deserted wing of the ancient old country house. Then, suddenly, she glanced back.

Like a flash Jim dodged into an angle of the wall.

When she looked behind her he was quite near a window through which the moonlight streamed, and he feared she had seen him.

Her conduct seemed to say she had not discovered the officer, however, for she opened the door and passed into the unused wing. Reid followed to the door, and, entering the next apartment, crouched behind an ornamental urn covered with dust, and watched her as she wandered aimlessly about the large apartment.

Finally she returned. The detective fled silently past, and he heard her enter her own apartment a moment later.

Then Jim again made his way to the deserted wing of the house.

Across one side of the main room—in which stood the ornamental urn which had concealed Jim while he watched the woman—was a curtain, old, faded, and moth-eaten, but the rays of his lantern disclosed the imprint of a human

hand in the dust that covered it. He glided forward, and pulled aside the curtain.

A door in the wall was exposed. Reid opened the door, and leaning forward, with his light raised, peered down into a pit-like place between the walls.

At the same time his eyes fell upon a small mirror set in the further side of the space, and he beheld in it the reflection of the room behind.

A moment later he saw in the mirror the form of Virginia Matland.

She stood with one hand resting upon the ornamental urn, peering at him with a startled expression upon her face. The detective wheeled about, but the woman had vanished.

The bottom of the pit-like closet was three feet beneath the floor, and as Jim lowered his light, the rays disclosed the form of a man lying on the floor at the bottom of the pit.

A moment, and the discovery was complete.

The man was dead. He had been stabbed to the heart, and in his discolored features Jim recognized Jerome Lake.

The mystery was solved.

Reid made his way to Virginia Matland's room.

Late as was the hour, he determined to arrest her unless she had already fled. He knocked at her door, but there was no answer.

Finally he tried the door, and found it locked.

The lock was a frail one. Placing his shoulder against it, he forced it open.

Upon the floor lay Virginia Matland, stone dead, while in her hand she held a bottle of prussic acid.

She had committed suicide.

A written confession, which she had hastily penned, stated that she had killed Jerome through mistake, thinking he was the man who had broken his engagement with her.

There was nothing more for Jim to do.

He left the house of mourning, and returned to New York, but the beautiful, passionate face of the woman, as he had seen it cold in death, haunted him for many days.

ANCIENT ARTIST IS WORKING THROUGH CHICAGO WOMAN

THE spirit of an ancient Egyptian artist of the Rameses period is at work in Chicago and is producing a vast output of fantastic pictures and hieroglyphics through the hands of Mrs. Emma Mabel Field. At least such is the theory of many spiritualists, while other persons contend that her work is the result of subconscious thought. Mrs. Field herself is neutral as between the opposing schools of thought.

"I just have to draw," she explained. "I can't tell why, yet."

The ouija board has nothing to do with it. Sometimes Mrs. Field does use a board, but it is merely a drawing board, and has no other relation to the ouija.

For ten years Mrs. Field has been drawing strange, fantastic pictures of Egyptian figures, symbols and scenes. She began this work when she was thirty years old and with no preparation. Ignorant of both art and mythology, with no conception of draftsmanship and utterly devoid of any knowledge of Egyptian decoration and symbolism, Mrs. Field says she began suddenly in 1910 to turn out fascinating pictures.

She worked with a soft lead pencil on sheets from two to four feet square. The pencil moved almost by itself in her hand, while she retained full consciousness. She says her hand seemed to move meaninglessly across the cardboard, scratching and scribbling away in sweeping lines. The pictures that took form, however, were detailed Egyptian symbolisms drawn with a touch and sureness entirely foreign to modern technique, it is said.

Museum curators and Egyptologists who have studied them are quoted as pronouncing the drawings perfect specimens of Egyptian art. From the dress decorations of the figures to the architectural detail of the scenes and the myriad symbol images the drawings are declared to be true to the Rameses period.

Sensitive persons have declared that an eerie feeling seizes them when they gaze on the pictures of ancient Egyptians with their hawklike profiles, their arms and legs in the conventional angular attitude of the ancients, interspersed with the pictures of sacred bugs and other fauna and flora of the land of the pyramids.

"I don't know what I am drawing," Mrs. Field explained. "I am conscious while drawing of wanting to do something, but I don't know what. I don't know what the things mean that I draw, but I do know they mean something and that all the figures and symbols and designs have a story in them. Professor James, of the University of Minnesota, and others at the university read the drawings easily and were able to tell me the story each one told. I have never studied drawing and can't draw anything but these things. When I draw there is no image in my mind of the thing I'm going to do—just an impulse. I don't believe in spiritualism, and although many people have told me that the drawings are made by an Egyptian ghost working through me I don't believe that.

"Professor James told me that it was a case of my subconscious mind being more developed than my conscious mind and that in my subconscious was an image of Egyptian learning and talent, dating, perhaps, from the time of Egypt itself. I feel strange toward my work and don't know just what to say about it."

The Mystery of Witches' Pool

By ALEXANDER DOUGLAS

ONE of the most romantic cases that has ever come in Detective Dean's way was that of the woman who was found drowned in Witches' Pool, on the Beersford estate, in Salem, Mass.

One morning, very near the hour for Tom Dean's lunch, as he was about to leave the office, the door opened and he found himself confronted by a young lady, attired in the height of fashion, and as beautiful and graceful as female face and form could well be.

The detective was not very easily impressed by female loveliness as a general thing, but this young woman was so radiant—so supremely lovely, that when she smiled and in a clear, resonant voice addressed Tom, he flushed like a school-boy, and half stammered as he placed a chair. Bowing low, he requested to be informed how he could serve her.

The young lady cast a quick glance about the room, then said:

"I am a stranger to you, although you are well known to me by reputation, and I have called to consult you regarding a matter of the most vital importance—a matter upon which my life happiness depends. The case which I am about to explain is a strange one, and I must ask you to observe the most profound secrecy regarding it."

"I assure you, miss, that you can rely upon my fidelity and discretion. No confidence you may intrust shall be violated, and the secrecy you desire shall be perfectly maintained," replied Dean.

"Thank you. I know that I can trust you fully, else I would not have selected you of all the New York detectives for the work I wish performed. I am Vane Stanhope."

Dean started, for he knew that Vane Stanhope was an heiress, and one of the most beautiful ladies in New York. At the age of twenty she was still unmarried.

"In order that you may be untrammeled by any lack of information I will place you in possession of all the facts," Vane Stanhope went on.

"As you may or may not know, the Beersfords of Salem are among the oldest and most aristocratic people in the country.

"There is not an estate to compare with 'Knightswood,' as the family possessions are called.

"At the present time the Beersford race is almost extinct, and the last of the race is Egbert Beersford."

"At the present time Egbert Beersford occupies Knightswood, dwelling there alone with his servants, unmarried, and a devotee of the pleasures of life.

"As I cannot see the happiness of my life slipping away, and ruin and disgrace coming to one whom I love, I must throw aside all reserve regarding my sentiments toward Egbert Beersford. I must tell you frankly that I love him. Do not think me bold for this avowal, for until very recently I supposed that Egbert Beersford returned my love, and that he was to become my husband.

"My father and Egbert's father were devoted friends, and it was agreed between them that Egbert and I should marry. I know that Egbert loved me even as I loved him, but of late a spell has fallen upon him. A woman, not of his race, a French lady, called the Alvira de Villers, will become his wife. Egbert Beersford shall never know that I am heartbroken at his treatment. I would save him from a union with one who will bring shame and disgrace upon him.

"No one hinted a word in disparagement of her to me previous to the first time I saw her; but from the moment I gazed upon the woman who had become my rival I distrusted her. Now I believe she is a living lie. I would unmask her. I would tear off the disguise she wears, and expose her to the world. She is an adventuress, and worse."

As she concluded she arose to her feet, and seemed like a beautiful but relentless Nemesis as she leaned toward Tom and uttered the accusation against the woman whom she believed had usurped her place in Egbert Beersford's heart.

"Tell me upon what you ground your accusation—of what evidence you have of the truth of your suspicions of the Alvira de Villers?" said the detective.

Vane Stanhope became seated.

"I wish you to help me to solve the mystery surrounding the French woman. I wish you to aid me in establishing the fact that she is an impostor—a fortune-hunting adventuress, and more."

"I am at your service," assented Dean.

"Thank you. Now I shall tell you why I believe this French woman to be an impostor. Read this note which reached me by yesterday's mail. She handed Tom a letter. It ran something like this:

Dear Lady.—If you would save your lover of other days from one who will bring disgrace and dishonor upon him, you should investigate the antecedents of the so-called Alvira de Villers.

There was no name signed to the letter.

"This is a slender foundation for your suspicions. It may come from some secret enemy of the French girl," said the officer.

"That is quite true, and yet I have my own con-

victions regarding the matter. Now, I desire you to secretly find out all of Alvira de Villers' past history, so that you can tell me just who and what she truly is. This investigation must be so secretly conducted, that should it prove that I am mistaken, and that she is not an adventuress, no harm will result to her. Although she is my rival, I would bring no trouble upon her if she is a worthy woman," Miss Stanhope said.

"I comprehend perfectly what you require of me and will undertake to satisfactorily accomplish what you wish," replied Dean.

"Again I thank you," she replied, and soon after she departed, leaving behind her upon the office table the anonymous note.

Undoubtedly, the author of the letter was an enemy of Alvira de Villers.

At the time the French girl was the guest of M. Clancy Bouvier, a French gentleman, residing but a short distance from Knightswood.

Dean determined to see the woman.

If she were an impostor, if she was playing a part, he fancied he should detect something of the kind in her manner; for the most subtle and finished of the cunning ones who live double lives have momentary lapses of caution.

Dean arrived at Knightswood, as the little station on the railway was called, one warm summer afternoon, and made his way toward M. Clancy Bouvier's residence on foot.

A walk of three miles along pleasant country roads, bordered by shade trees in long avenues, brought him to the edge of the grounds surrounding the residence of the French gentleman whose guest Alvira de Villers was.

Dean entered the grounds through an arched gateway, and proceeded toward the residence through the ornamental forest, beyond which he could see the cupola of the mansion, with its many windows gleaming in the bright sunlight like frames of flame.

Suddenly, as he walked on, the moss-grown path scarcely giving a sound of his footsteps, the sound of voices came distinctly to Tom's ears, and peering through the intervening boughs, he saw a woman standing at the door of a rustic pagoda, which she seemed to wish to escape from, while a man barred her way.

"Stay, stay, you must not leave me until you have heard what I say. I followed you all the way from New York to tell you that you shall not wed the Yankee. I love you, Alvira. I have loved you for years. When you poisoned the old wine-merchant and became the possessor of his wealth after you had been his wife a year, you promised you would become my wife. Then you met Beersford, while you were masquerading at the seashore, under the fictitious title of the Countess Alvira de Villers. You fascinated the man, and he offered to make you his wife. You consented, and followed him here to become a guest of "Old To-To, the forger," as we used to know M. Clancy Bouvier among the Apaches of Paris. You thought to deceive me, but you shall not, Valeri Choptine."

These words spoken by the man reached the detective with perfect distinctness, and though they were spoken in French, he understood that language.

At the name "Valeri Choptine," Dean started so violently that he almost betrayed his presence.

Valeri Choptine was the name of a character well known to the Parisian police. Her picture and an alarm had been sent to the New York police by the Parisian prefect as she had come to America. Just at this time she was wanted on the charge of murdering an old merchant whom she had married under an assumed name.

Dean had Valeri Choptine's picture at home. It had been forwarded to him by the Franco-English detective agency at Paris.

From the position in which he stood he could not clearly see the woman's face at first, but a moment later she moved so that her features were disclosed. There was no mistake, although she wore a blonde wig, the features were those of Valeri Choptine, the Parisian poisoner, and one of the members of the worst company of Apaches that had ever cursed the French metropolis with their presence.

"You shall not dictate to me, Emile Legorrie. Let me pass. I am now Alvira de Villers, and I shall soon be the wife of Beersford. Who will believe you if you tell your story here? I will denounce you as a madman, and you will be thrown into prison. Go, Legorrie, you and I have naught in common now. I have abandoned the old life forever, and will never return to it. I, who sneered at love and won the hearts of others but to make them my victims, have met my own fate at last. I love Egbert Beersford for himself alone, and I will not give him up," said the woman passionately.

"You really love him, and you do not mean to add him to your list of victims?" cried Legorrie.

"As I said, I love him better than life; I could not lose him. I should choose death rather than that," she answered.

"Then he shall die!" hissed Legorrie.

As he spoke he drew a dagger and flourished it in the air. Suddenly he sprang at the girl who had spurned his love and exclaimed:

"I will kill you and myself instead of the American. I care not for life now."

As he spoke a pistol appeared in the hands of Valeri Choptine.

The next moment, and as Dean was about to leap forward, she discharged the weapon at her desperate lover's head.

As the detonation rang out Legorrie staggered backward, and with both hands clasped to his head, he fell face downward at the feet of the Circe whom he had loved.

"God! What shall I do? How shall I secrete his body?" muttered the beautiful fury, as she

stood with the smoking pistol in her hands, gazing down upon the man at her feet.

At that moment Tom rushed from his concealment, seized her by the arms, and took her pistol.

"Valeri Choptine," he said sternly, "I know all about you; but for the honor of an old family, and because of my promise to a good lady to preserve secrecy, I will not arrest you. I will spare you if you will leave America forever, and never, never look again upon the face of Egbert Beersford. Refuse, and I'll lodge you in the county jail within the hour, and Beersford shall know that the woman he would have made his wife is a criminal—an impostor—a murderess!"

The woman recoiled at Dean's words, and her face grew pale as death.

"Curse you! Curse you!" she cried. "I had resolved to lead a better life, and I loved Beersford as I love my own life. My dream is over. I will promise as you wish; I will go away. I swear that Beersford shall never look upon my face while I live. If I do this, will you keep my secret from him?"

"I will," answered Dean.

"I surmise you are a detective, and you have only done this because you were paid to find me out. I will trust in your promise, and I shall be glad if Egbert never learns the truth regarding Emile. He at least loved me, unworthy as I was; rather go out of his life forever unknown; I would rather that my fate remain a mystery than that he should think of me as I am."

At that moment Dean heard a sound behind them.

His back was toward the man who had fallen at the discharge of Valeri Choptine's pistol, and now as he turned he saw the supposed dead man disappearing in the direction of the mansion.

"I am glad I did not kill him. My bullet must have grazed his skull and stunned him only. Poor Emile! he at least loved me, unworthy as I was; but he was one of us—a criminal," said Valeri Choptine sadly. "I go now, never to return; but as you value the life of Egbert, hasten after that man—pursue Emile Legorrie. There is murder in his heart, and he is desperate. He is going towards Knightswood, and has sworn to kill Beersford! For the love of heaven prevent that crime. Save the life of Egbert Beersford. You may be too late to save him even now."

Tom waited not an instant, but dashed at once in pursuit of Legorrie.

Running through the wood, he gained the highway.

Dean expected to see Legorrie in the distance, for he had headed toward the road which led to Knightswood mansion.

Tom was at a loss to account for the disappearance of Legorrie, unless, anticipating pursuit, he had taken a circuitous route.

Dean reached the mansion and demanded an immediate audience with Beersford, but a servant assured him he was engaged with a French gentleman, and he must wait.

The detective knew that Legorrie was alone with the man whose life he meant to take, so he said:

"I am the secretary of the gentleman who is with your boss, and I have brought papers which he forgot. Your master will be very angry, if you don't at once admit me."

The servant seemed convinced, and led Tom along the hall.

They had paused before a door, which the servant was about to open, when a pistol-shot from within rang out.

Dean threw open the door, and dashed into the room.

Beersford was struggling with the would-be assassin, who had a dagger in his hand, while his pistol lay upon the floor.

In an instant Dean disarmed the Frenchman, and, assisted by servants, secured him.

Beersford told Tom the man had fired at him, and missing his aim, dropped the weapon and rushed at him with his dagger. Tom's timely arrival brought a termination to the desperate struggle which followed between them.

The man was removed from the mansion and conveyed to the county jail.

The detective saw him in prison, and told him that if he would keep the secret of Valeri Choptine he would secure his release, and as he swore to remain silent regarding her, Tom did induce Beersford not to appear against him.

The days went by after this, and the whole countryside was amazed at the sudden and most mysterious disappearance of Alvira de Villers, who had vanished from M. Clancy Bouvier's house without a word as to her intention, and leaving all her belongings behind her.

A week later, two ladies, guests of Mr. Clancy Bouvier, visited a deep, dark, stagnant pool in the heart of a gloomy wood on his estate, and discovered a body floating on the surface of the black water, which was called "Witches' Pool!"

The more courageous of the two ladies found a long pole, dragged it to the water, and drew out of the pool the dead body of the person "found drowned!"

They had known the woman, and they recognized the body.

The person they had found drowned was Valeri Choptine, but they never knew her secret, and why the beautiful girl committed suicide was always a mystery to them and to Egbert Beersford.

The latter seemed deeply grieved, and went upon a long journey—a tour of the Continent.

A year later he returned, and then his old love for Vane Stanhope revived, and she became his wife.

The Rise of "The Comet"

By CHARLES T. JORDAN.

IT mattered not to "Comet" Cadogan that chivalry had been the direct cause of his most recent downfall. For three years he had looked forward to his release and the second attempt. And to-day—a four-hour investigation had stunned him, embittered his mind. Perhaps it was too late! His little piglike eyes were restless as he slumped along a side street, just before nightfall. "I'll not do time again—on Means' testimony," he muttered significantly, as he turned a corner to avoid encountering Plainclothesman Harris, whom he had espied nearly a block away.

At half-past ten that evening he scurried across a well-kept lawn to the shade of a two-storied structure, shingled, set well back on its lot. Half an hour ago the last light had been extinguished.

It did not take him long to force a ground floor window, nor much longer to scramble noiselessly into the front room. The Comet disdained to remove his shoes. He had obtained a rubber-heeled pair, and could operate in them with little noise.

He tiptoed across the room and slowly, cautiously, tried a door. It was not locked, and the room beyond was as dark as the one he was in. The door a foot ajar, he flashed his torch about. It appeared to be the living room.

The Comet thrust the door farther open, and crossed the threshold. At his second stride into the sitting room, he cringed, his eyes blinded by the sudden flood of light the click of a switch had warned him too late.

The Comet's red eyes sought the cause of the interruption, and found him, in slippered feet and a dressing gown, just across the center table. The man was tall, angular-faced, armed. A peculiar smile twitched his lips.

"You, Cadogan—again?" He did not lower the revolver.

"Yes, Means, damn you! I——"

"This is a coincidence," smiled the investment broker, who was considered by his fellow citizens as honest a man as dwelt in Oakfield. "After what happened three years ago, this visit is unlooked for. But I am prepared, you see. I have been, ever since that night. I'll warrant you had little idea you were entering my home to-night."

"I came here on purpose—to get you, Means—and someone else." The Comet choked out the words. "No—not with a gun," he added with a sneer. "With my bare hands. And, damn you, I'll——"

Mr. Means' elevated eyelids betokened considerable surprise. His voice remained calm, however. "Don't grow excited, Cadogan," he advised. "I know how to use this. I'd hate to, I assure you; but—have a chair." With a long left forefinger he pointed to a rocker on the Comet's side of the table.

Cadogan's coarse features became even more reminiscent of a bulldog's. His piglike eyes glared. But he slumped into the rocking chair.

"I saw some one loafing near the fence just before I turned out my light," the investment broker explained his presence. "I didn't suspect it was you, though. I watched for a while and saw him sneak across the lawn. Then I came downstairs. But you, Cadogan. Better think it over, and go quietly out the way you came. Be better, wouldn't it?"

A harder glint to the Comet's small eyes was the only reply this elicited.

Means pulled out a chair from his side of the center table, and without removing his glance from the ex-convict's face, lowered himself to its seat.

"So you came to get me, Cadogan?"

"You're dead right!" The words came slowly, and were spoken barely audibly. The Comet's thick lips hardly parted to let them out. "And I will—if I swing for it."

Mr. Means hesitated. "Do you realize, Cadogan, that I have only to remove the receiver and call in the police?" The telephone stood on the table between them.

Cadogan leered. "Call 'em, if you want to. But before they get here——"

"You might as well quit threatening," Means spoke briskly. "It happens that I have the upper hand this time. Why not explain why you came? I'm not anxious to call the police in at all. I'd much rather you'd go in peace. But in view of what you've just said, I believe I am entitled to an explanation. Why are you so desirious of getting me, Cadogan?"

The Comet did not reply for a moment. He was thinking—planning. If only he could wrest the weapon from Means! But Means wasn't apt to relax his caution while the Comet's present attitude endured. Yet it wouldn't do to alter his demeanor too suddenly. It would rouse suspicion in the investment broker's mind.

"Come, Cadogan; why do you want to get me?"

"As if you don't know!" he replied sullenly.

"You surely don't consider yourself justified in attacking me because I took the stand I did three years ago? It was my duty to appear in court. You had broken into my home. You didn't get away with anything, true. But you only got three years. Surely that isn't cause enough——"

"Ain't, eh? Just lay that down a second, and——"

"No, thank you, Cadogan. Can't you see that I was merely doing my duty as a citizen?"

"Duty!" There was contempt, stark hatred in the way the Comet pronounced the word. "And I suppose you considered it your duty to——" Then the Comet's lips closed viciously.

Means' cheeks paled slightly. Then a tinge of red darkened the cheekbones. "I can see you imagine you have some deeper motive than that, Cadogan. Come, let's have it."

The Comet hesitated, craftily eyeing the other. But Means gave no evidence of relaxed vigilance. "Course it ain't that alone," said Cadogan at last. "I knew what it meant if I got caught, and I was prepared to take it without a word, if I'd been able to put through what I was after. But you got me too soon. If I'd been able to grab what I was after, and get away for ten minutes, I'd gladly have given myself up—for I'd made up my mind to go straight after that one job. Oh, you can sneer, but that's the how of it!"

"Thought you might lift enough to set yourself up in business, or something of the sort?" inquired Means with a leer.

"Think again!" snapped the Comet. "No, Means," his voice became less harsh, softened no doubt by memory of one good thing in his checkered past, "I didn't come to steal at all. I came to get back what belonged to another."

A look of cynical disbelief shone mockingly from the broker's countenance. "Some one else. I imagine so, Cadogan!"

"But it's so," the Comet contended. Though his tone had become greatly modified, he did not for one instant forget the other's weapon. Given the slightest opportunity, and he would lunge across the table and—— But Means, too, seemed to sense the Comet's purpose, and appeared constantly on the alert for a false move on the ex-convict's part. "Perhaps you've never heard of Mrs. Arthur Sampson."

"Sampson?" Means' cheeks ashened for a fraction of a second, then resumed their natural color. "Sampson? I can't say I have, Cadogan."

"Possibly you won't say so. But you knew her—well!" was the Comet's retort. "I came to your house three years ago to right the wrong you did the Widow Sampson."

An angry light came into the broker's eyes. "I tell you I know nothing about a woman of that name!"

"I heard you, Means. But you lie!"

"You—I——"

"You persuaded her to come to your home and succeeded in coaxing her into investing every cent she had in Flannery Lubricants—one of the wildest of wildcat oil stocks ever run off the press."

"Again I insist I know nothing about the matter," said Means, his face fiery.

"And again I say you lie," came from the Comet's outthrust jaw. "I don't doubt your books show no record of the transaction. But you put it through all right, and that's why I visited you that night—to make you take your bogus stock back and return Mrs. Sampson's money."

"Even granting that I had turned such a despicable trick, who would believe your cock-and-bull story?" sneered Means. "You—a common crook with a record risk your liberty to right a wrong for a poor, mistreated widow woman. It's to laugh, Cadogan. It's too ridiculous."

The Comet's face darkened. "You'll swallow those words, Means, before I'm through with you. Mrs. Sampson was a good woman. I was injured by an automobile in front of her place, and she took me in and cared for me until I was able to get around again. Of course she didn't know I had served time. She doesn't now. But I was a stranger in distress, and she took me in. And you—you have as good as murdered her."

"I——"

"Shut up and let me talk. I met Mrs. Sampson on her way home from your place the night you turned your despicable trick. She confided in me—showed me the handful of rubbish you had given her in exchange for two thousand dollars—practically every cent she had in the world. I knew that Flannery Lubricants stuff the minute I laid eyes on it, and I told her just what it was worth. With her permission I took it and came directly to your place to compel you to take it back. But you had evidently stepped out, and I took a long chance and tried to get into your safe. You hadn't stepped out, however. You had hidden on hearing me enter the place. You were watching all the time from behind the curtained space in the library. And when my back was turned you sneaked in behind me and laid me out with a terrific blow on the head with something a good deal heavier than your fist.

"Then you called in the cops and I was taken out, still unconscious. You had watched my every move and knew I hadn't touched a thing, which must explain why you didn't search me. If you had, it's a cinch the stock you had sold Mrs. Sampson never would have been in my pocket when I came to at the police station."

"Very, very probable," Means could not refrain from putting in at this point.

"Probable or not, it is true, and I can prove it!" spoke the Comet vehemently. "Harris, the plainclothesman, asked me about it. And, by the way, I saw him only a few hours ago, and dodged around a corner before he could recognize me. He asked me about that stock, and I told him it belonged to the Widow Sampson. I even told him most of what I've just told you. And his disbelief wasn't half as marked as yours is. He took the stock and what little money I had, and sent it to Mrs. Sampson on my request, and he promised not to intimate to her my real identity. Of course she didn't know me as Cadogan. And I believe he did as I desired."

"Your story might be interesting to some," said Means sharply, "but I confess it bores me."

"It'll more than bore you before I'm done," asserted the Comet. "Ever hear of Mike Kellogg?" he asked suddenly.

Means did not reply, but his cheeks paled perceptibly.

"They got him about six months ago," the Comet continued. "I got to know him pretty well, and he sold you for a pittance a bale of Flannery Lubricants stock a week before you put through your crooked deal with Mrs. Sampson."

"It's a lie! You can't prove it. I never heard of your Mike Kellogg."

"No? Funny you gave him your check for twelve dollars and a half. A lot of folks have seen it, and——"

"This has gone far enough!" exclaimed the ashen-hued investment broker. "I——"

"Wait till I'm through," snapped the Comet. "With the proof I could get through Kellogg I could have made you come through in full with interest, and up to this afternoon I'd have been content with that. But when I learned that——"

"Learned what?" A hard, crafty look came into the taller man's eyes.

"How you've treated Mrs. Sampson while I served time. How you turned her out of the home she'd occupied twenty years, after she'd paid you in rent——"

"Stop! I tell you I know nothing of Mrs. Sampson."

"You lie!" The Comet's voice rose. "You rented the place through an agent I know. And you're the direct cause of Mrs. Sampson's condition now. If she'd had that two thousand dollars she might have started a little business of some sort, and gotten along. But with it gone and turned out of her home—— She wasn't very strong, anyway. But with that and undernourishment—well, it didn't surprise me when the neighbors informed me that she had contracted a racking cough. The last heard of her hereabouts she was well on her way to the grave via the consumption route. And I know what that means, believe me! My mother—— But enough. I'm tired of the story, too, Means. You know now damn well why I'm here. You're just as responsible as though you had planted a knife in her back. She may be dead now. I don't know. But if she lives I'll find her, and she'll get what's coming to her from you! Now you know why I'm visiting you to-night. You're going to come through. Oh, I know you're armed. What of it? I'll make you come through in full, and then I'll——" A demoniacal light came into the little ex-convict's eyes, and he started to rise from the rocker.

"Back, there, Cadogan!" Means' voice was hard as steel. "Back, or I'll——"

"You don't dare!" But, for the moment, Cadogan sank back into his chair.

"I'm glad you've told me as much as you have, Cadogan," said the investment broker slowly. "I'm glad you didn't take my advice and leave quietly, as I would foolishly have let you do. But now I've heard your story, and—— Well, you know too much.

"I bought those Flannery Lubricants shares from Kellogg. Why deny it? And I sold them to Mrs. Sampson. But she bought them of her own free will, so why should I worry about their real value? I had her evicted, too. Why not? She failed to come through with the rent, and there were plenty of others eager enough to occupy the place and to pay for it."

"You cur!"

Means winced. "So she doesn't know you have served time? I'll see that she is enlightened after I've finished with you—if she's still alive," he added with a harsh laugh. "And if she's not—well, that's no concern of mine. So you came here to make me settle in full, did you, Cadogan? And then to get me—with your own bare hands?" He let out a raucous chuckle.

But he pulled himself together as he observed the red malignancy that burned in the Comet's narrow slits of eyes. Involuntarily he shrank back, then stiffened himself and rose to his feet. "Lord, he's stark mad!" he gasped, half aloud.

The Comet's rubber-soled shoes were slowly drawn back under the front of his chair. He was aware that sudden action might be necessary, and soon. He must be ready for anything—to spring to one side or—— For murder now glared from the evil countenance of the investment broker.

His lips drew up in a snarl: "Cadogan, you know too much! With you out of the way I've nothing to fear. But with you and Kellogg—I can take no chances. You've threatened me. You have broken into my home. I have a right to protect myself. The law will uphold my action. Cadogan, I'm going to count to twenty, and then——"

"I'd gladly stop your bullet right now," said the Comet calmly, "if I knew the right thing would be done by——"

He paused in mid-sentence and peered to his left, then behind him.

"No trickery," warned Means. "Now: One, two, three——"

But Cadogan had heard a movement near the doorway he had himself entered half an hour before, and now he heard it again. He turned toward Means once more, as it sounded a third time. And this time Means heard it, too.

"So, Cadogan, you brought a pal! No wonder you were so confident you'd get me!" He raised his voice. "Come out of there, whoever you are. Quick, or I'll fire!"

"I'm coming fast enough," came in a voice which Cadogan recognized instantly, "and I'd advise you to put that gun away mighty pronto, Means!" as a figure stepped into the room behind Cadogan.

Evidently Means was too wrought up to obey, for instead of dropping his revolver he turned it point-blank on the newest arrival.

But Cadogan divined the move, even as it was being made, and with a wild lunge forward he grasped the outstretched wrist of the investment broker with the pent strength of a madman. Means on his feet, the Comet sprawled across the table, they struggled for a moment, unevenly. But before the third occupant of the room could get between them a sickening report sounded. The revolver must have pointed downward, for instantly the viselike grip on the financier's wrist was relaxed, and the Comet rolled dizzily from the table to the floor.

"You — got — me — that — time — Means!" he gasped. "Through—the guts!"

But before Means could raise his arm again he was seized and thrown to the floor, the revolver wrenched from his grasp. Cold steel suddenly tightly encircled his wrists, and he cringed away from the muzzle of the weapon that glared down at him menacingly from Plainclothesman Harris' hand. Harris picked up the telephone, summoned a doctor and notified headquarters.

Then he turned to where the Comet lay. "Cadogan, old man, I'm living now. But if it hadn't been for your leap—— He took me by surprise —flurried me. I can see you're done for," he hastened on. "But get this, old man, before you go. I saw you swing that corner, and have been at your heels ever since. Mrs. Sampson isn't as far gone as you've been informed. Good folks have taken her in hand, and she's improving. With what this hyena, Means, is made to cough up, she'll have a fresh outlook. And she'll know whom she owes it to. Your tip I overheard is going to help me fix a lot of things where they belong—on Means' carcass. Did you get it, old scout?"

A faint smile played grotesquely for an instant at the Comet's ugly lips, then faded.

"One good bad man!" mumbled Harris, swallowing as he murmured the words.

A SOLDIER'S CHANCES

GREAT as the danger and large as the losses in the aggregate, the individual soldier has plenty of chances of coming out of war unscathed, or at least not badly injured.

Based on the mortality statistics of the allied armies, a soldier's chances are as follows:

Twenty-nine chances of coming home to one chance of being killed.

Forty-nine chances of recovering from wounds to one chance of dying from them.

One chance in 500 of losing a limb.

Will live five years longer because of physical training, is freer from disease in the army than in civil life, and has better medical care at the front than at home.

In other wars from ten to fifteen men died from disease to one from bullets; in this war one man died from disease to every ten from bullets.

For those of our fighting men who did not escape scatheless, the Government under the soldier and sailor insurance law gives protection to the wounded and their dependents and to the families and dependents of those who made the supreme sacrifice for their country.

OPIUM A BURIED TREASURE

IT remains for a Tacoma negro to give a new meaning to the old expression concerning buried treasure. He actually buried the drug and the Government officials in their search for opium found it necessary to get a plough and turn up parts of the farm where the smuggler was operating on a large scale. The secret service operatives had suspected a conspiracy, but it was only after a long wait and the exercise of much patience that they were enabled to get down to the details of the scheme. Every vessel that came in from the Orient was carefully searched, but none of them yielded any return for all of this vexatious work.

Finally Frank Burke decided to go and meet one of the ships long before it reached port. He had a notion that the smuggling was being done before the vessel docked. He was corect. Standing behind the big smokestack, with his cap pulled down over his eyes, he watched and waited.

Shortly after the pilot was taken aboard unusual activity was displayed aft in the ship. Presently when the great vessel slowed down to crawl into port the detective noticed a launch and several rowboats hovering about. It was almost dusk, but Burke detected one of the crew tossing over packages of the crude opium into the water. The men in the boats caught it and then hastily rowed away.

The detective waited until port was reached and then placed the seaman under arrest. He was given the third degree and confessed that he was simply one of a number in the opium conspiracy. Between his confession and their own investigations they found that the drug was carried in the boats through a small creek for a few miles from the city and then brought to the farm in wagons. Here it was buried and dug up from time to time as it was required. Those who were concerned in this case say that the Given farm—it was owned by a man named William Given—was the richest piece of land in the State of Washington. And no one has ever denied the claim.

By Accident

By RICHARD DAVIS MOORE

BY accident Ben Wade, the private detective, became involved in a peculiar case, which was the means of introducing him to one of the most aristocratic and influential of the old families of New York.

He was at work at the time on the notorious Nathan murder case, and in following up a supposed clue to the perpetrator of that crime, he accidentally stumbled upon another case.

The vague and uncertain threads of evidence, suppositions and theories which he had evolved from a careful study of the mysterious Nathan case presented to his mind certain possibilities, but in order to verify them, and thus form the first well-defined link in a coil which he hoped to complete about the mysterious assassin of the old man, it became necessary that he should win the confidence of a certain band of desperate criminals who infested the city of New York.

The problem that presented itself was how to accomplish this.

After a mature consideration of this most important question, and realizing full well that his life might depend upon the result of his decision, he determined to ingratiate himself with the going under a false identity.

The photographs of several of the members of the band of crooked people whom he desired to pipe adorned the Rogues' Gallery, and Ben was, by reason of the fact that his professional duties had brought him in contact with them, somewhat familiar with the personal peculiarities of the band, or, at least, of several of its most dangerous members.

Considering his own personal appearance, Ben concluded that he could, by means of an elaborate disguise, assume the identity of "Red Leary," a celebrated criminal.

Ben determined to sink his own identity for the time in that of the most dangerous criminal of New York.

However, there was one source of peril which might be presumed to attend Ben's contemplated undertaking against which he fancied himself effectually guarded.

Red Leary had been arrested secretly while en route for Baltimore, Md., by Mr. Roberts, of the Pinkerton agency.

The celebrated criminal was at the time in prison in Baltimore, but no one, save the authorities of the prison, were aware of the identity of the prisoner.

When arrested, Red Leary had given an assumed name, and was in disguise.

It suited the detective's purpose—a purpose connected with the Nathan case—to permit Red Leary to suppose that he had deceived him, and that he did not recognize him.

It was to Red Leary's interest to conceal his identity from every one, and Ben consequently had no fear that the secret of his arrest had become known, even to his pals.

The headquarters of the gang to whom Red Leary belonged was a disreputable dive on Houston street.

One dark, rainy night Ben, perfectly made up to represent Red Leary, made his way to the Houston street resort of the criminals. Before departing upon this perilous mission of detection, he had instructed his assistants to secure the services of the police, and make a raid upon the rendezvous of the crooks in case he did not report at the office by daybreaek.

It was nearly midnight when Wade descended the dark and muddy steps leading downward to the underground retreat of New York's most noted characters in the red romance of crime.

The exterior of the place was repellant in the extreme. Wade continued boldly downward, and threw open a door at the foot of the stairs.

In a moment he found himself in a dingy barroom. A huge, brutal-looking man, with a long livid scar that rendered his appearance absolutely horrible, stood behind the bar, and four men, whom Wade instantly recognized as members of the band whom he had determined to pipe, were seated at a table in the rear, engaged in playing poker.

"How are you, Red? How's tricks in Baltimore?" cried the bartender, leaning over the bar and extending a hand a trifle smaller than an ordinary sized ham.

"All right; but I've been on the quiet down there," the detective replied, grasping the bartender's extended hand and returning the peculiar iron grip he gave.

Then as the men at the table sauntered forward and greeted Ben in a friendly and familiar way, he treated them, and conversed in an offhand way, imitating Red Leary's voice so perfectly that he saw that the criminals were completely deceived.

After a while the four men left the dive, and Wade was left alone with the bartender.

As yet he had not heard a word spoken that could possibly be construed into a reference to the Nathan case. Now that there were no spectators to see or hear anything that transpired in the dive, the bartender said, in a confidential way:

"The party who had a long palaver with you here one night two weeks ago was asking for you to-night. He wanted to see you bad, and said

you promised to meet him. He waited a long time, and finally, when he left, he said for me to tell you that he would meet you here to-morrow night at eleven o'clock. I didn't give it away that I even knew you, for I suspected he might be working 'a plant.'"

"What sort of a man was he?" asked Wade.

"A young man. He was dressed in the latest togs, and I'd take him to be a sort of a gentleman sport," replied the bartender.

"I can hardly tell whether he is the guy I expected to meet here to-night or not. Can't you put me wise to his nibs, so I can know?"

"Well, he had dark hair, heavy eyebrows, a black mustache, and, now I think of it, he was just a little inclined to look two ways for Sunday."

"You mean he was a little cross-eyed?"

"Yes, that's it, Red."

"All right; I know him now. He's the party I wanted to see. You tell him to wait for me if he shows up here to-morrow night before I do. You see, I've got some important business with him." Here Ben paused, glanced about the room apprehensively, and lowering his voice to a whisper, he added: "The Nathan business!"

The bartender started, and the detective fancied that his bloated face paled for a moment.

He regarded Ben silently for a moment, and then he said:

"I'll tell him what you say, Red."

Soon after that he left the dive.

It at once occurred to Ben that the stranger might be a person whose acquaintance it would pay to cultivate.

As the detective reflected upon the bartender's description of the unknown after he had returned to his office, it seemed to him that he had seen the original, but when or where Ben could not recollect.

The officer devoted the next day to looking for a person who corresponded with the man the bartender of the Houston street dive had described.

Ben knew that none of the detectives engaged on the Nathan case suspected any one corresponding to the man who had important business with Red Leary. It occurred to him that perhaps he was destined to be the first to connect a new party with the mysterious murder.

At about four o'clock next day Ben sauntered into the barroom of the hotel, expecting, according to appointment previously made, to meet Mr. Roberts, of the Pinkerton agency there.

In this he was disappointed, but he was more than repaid for his friend's failure to keep his appointment, for coming out of the bar-room he met face to face the man who had engrossed his thoughts all day, the man described by the bartender.

He was an elegantly dressed young man, and his description, including a slight degree of strabismus, or cross-eyedness, accorded accurately with the description of the party who had an appointment with Red Leary.

Ben remained in front of the Astor smoking a cigar, like any careless lounger, until his man came out. He then became his shadow, and before night had learned the following facts regarding him:

His name was Barton Leopold, was of German extraction, and at present engaged presumably in the insurance business. He had been considered wealthy, still moved in good society, was a divorced man, and was at present somewhat fast. He gambled and paid little attention to business.

Leopold was a man of fierce, unforgiving and vindictive temperment, but had never been suspected of crime.

This was the character of the man who was an intimate acquaintance with Red Leary, as it would appear.

The detective could not imagine what such a man could have in common with a brutal assassin of "Red's" type, and yet he knew that there are subtle chords underlying the exterior natures of all men that render certain passions, such as the desire for vengeance and the thirst for gain, a bond of union.

Wade had determined to meet Barton Leopold in the character of Red Leary that night at the Houston street dive, and meant to learn his secret, for Ben could only suspect that it concerned the Nathan case.

He was at the dive before Leopold came in, but had not been seated at one of the tables in the rear of the bar-room more than ten minutes when his man entered.

It chanced that there was no one save the barkeeper and Ben in the room.

Barton Leopold came directly to Ben's side.

He seated himself at the table, saying in a nervous and excited way:

"I thought you had failed me. You remember what I told you the last time we met?"

Ben nodded in assent, though of course I hadn't the faintest idea of what he referred to.

"When I left you at the close of our last interview you told me that you would consider the matter that I wished you to do for me, and give me an answer at our next meeting. You know, Red Leary, I've got you. One word from me will electrocute you. The mystery of a great murder case will be a mystery no longer if I speak," Barton Leopold went on.

"Can it be that this man holds the secret of the Nathan murder?" Ben thought.

He may refer to some other crime, and I'll bet that he is tempting Red Leary to commit a crime he dare not accomplish himself. It may be that while engaged in working up the Nathan murder case I have stumbled upon a new case by accident."

On the spur of the moment Wade said aloud:

"Give me until to-morrow night to consider."

"I will, but not a day longer. I must have my revenge upon the woman who left me to become the wife of my enemy," replied Leopold.

Then Leopold left the dive.

The detective was sure now that he had accidentally got hold of a new case and meant to follow it. There was a woman in the case, and she it was upon whom Leopold meant to take his revenge.

But in what form? From his having sought the services of such a man as Red Leary Ben feared the worst.

It would not surprise him to learn that Leopold wished Leary to commit a murder.

The officer spent the next day in shadowing Leopold, but found out nothing to his discredit.

The following night he for the third time repaired to the dive on Houston street.

He descended the stairs, but the sounds of his footsteps were drowned by the music of an Italian harp and an accompanying violin.

He cautiously pushed open the door of the dive, but the moment he caught a glimpse of the interior he closed it again.

The detective was never more startled in all his life than at that very moment, for he saw Red Leary himself seated at a table in the rear of the dive.

As he afterwards learned, the experienced jailbreaker had escaped from the Baltimore prison and had arrived in New York that very day.

Ben regained the pavement, turning up his coat collar, drawing his hat well down over his eyes so as to conceal his features at the same time.

It was well that he did this for the success of the plan that had formed itself in his mind the moment he discovered that Red Leary was at large. He regained the street, Barton Leopold brushed by and descended into the dive.

The detective had determined to let matters take their course, and if Red Leary attempted to commit the crime which Leopold planned, he would thwart his purpose.

Quickly removing the more important articles of the disguise which he had assumed as Red Leary—consisting of a beard and wig—he stationed himself in sight of the dive.

In the course of half an hour Red Leary appeared, accompanied by Leopold. They walked for some distance, and Wade followed them. At length they took a taxicab and Ben did the same.

They were driven rapidly away, and it was not long before their vehicle halted in the entrance of a side street well up on the aristocratic part of the resident portion of Fifth avenue.

Wade gave his orders to my chauffeur, and he pulled up close to the pave in the dark shadow of a tall building.

Alighting, Ben crept along after Red Leary and his companion, who had now left their car.

They entered a gate, and, a moment later, disappeared in the shadowy, arched doorway of an elegant mansion.

There was no chance of Ben's approaching nearer without betraying himself.

"If they mean to enter the house it will take them some time to get the door open. Had I better rush forward and take the chance of losing my own life by attempting to arrest them single-handed, or shall I send my chauffeur to seek police assistance?" thought the detective.

At this moment a dense mass of clouds crept over the silvery disk of the full moon, and the night became as dark as possible.

The detective now cautiously crept nearer the door.

Then he heard Leopold's voice.

"You can make no mistake. The first room on the right at the head of the stairs. Secure it, and we'll be off. Come, do not hesitate; this is nothing compared with the other job of which I know you to be guilty," Leopold said.

"Curse you! Always that other crime. I shall be your slave, now that you hold that secret, until one of us dies!" hissed Red Leary.

Then Ben heard the faint sound of an opening door. There was a space of silence.

A moment later Red Leary reappeared with a bundle in his arms. The two men then hurried to their machine and entered it. They drove off at once, and Wade followed in his taxi.

Red Leary and his companion proceeded directly to Greene street.

Ben's car was close behind them, when suddenly the report of a pistol reached his ears, and mingled with the detonation was a yell of agony from the machine in advance of his own, which had suddenly halted.

He sprang from his vehicle and rushed toward the other.

Two policemen, who had been standing on a corner opposite, reached the car in advance of Ben, and as they stood at the open door the rays from their lanterns illuminated its interior somewhat.

The detective saw Barton Leopold lying half upon the seat and half upon the floor. There was a bullet-hole in his temple, and he was stone dead. Red Leary and the bundle had disappeared, and of course Ben's supposition was that he had shot Leopold.

Ben's first thought was that Leopold had died with Red Leary's secret, which he suspected related to the Nathan murder, unrevealed. The police took charge of the murdered man, and Ben returned home. Next morning the papers contained an account of the mysterious abduction of the child of Mrs. Rose Leopold, from the residence of her father on Fifth avenue.

Like a flash it occurred to Wade that Leopold and Red Leary had stolen the child, and without the loss of a moment he hastened to the residence of Mrs. Leopold's father.

As soon as he made known who he was, he was placed in possession of the following facts by Mrs. Henderson, Mrs. Leopold's mother, for Mrs.

Leopold was absent from home, and did not yet know that her child had been stolen.

"Barton Leopold married Rose Henderson against the wishes of her parents, and when he found that her parents would not supply him with money he abused her until her parents took her home and procured a divorce.

"Leopold fought the divorce, and had sworn to be revenged upon the wife whom his brutality had estranged and driven from his house.

"Mrs. Leopold had a little child—a girl two years of age—and the court that granted her divorce gave her the custody of the child.

"Within the last month Mrs. Leopold, the divorced wife, had become engaged to a gentleman in every way worthy of a good woman's love.

"When Barton Leopold heard of his divorced wife's engagement, it was said that he had sworn to prevent the marriage and revenge himself upon his former wife for obtaining a divorce from him against his will."

As Mrs. Henderson, the mother of the divorced wife, concluded her statement, the arrival of Mrs. Leopold was announced.

"I beg of you, Mrs. Henderson, not to make known my presence when Mrs. Leopold enters the room, but tell her of the loss of her child. I would judge of her worthiness to have the care of the child by her manner," said Wade.

Mrs. Henderson consented.

A few moments later a beautiful young woman, who had removed her bonnet and street-wrap, entered the room.

She greeted her mother warmly.

Ben had stepped behind a curtain, and she did not see him.

Mrs. Leopold seated herself in an arm-chair upon one side of the little table, upon which Mrs. Henderson's morning coffee-service sat, and her mother became seated opposite her. Then Mrs. Henderson told her daughter of the disappearance of her child. Mrs. Leopold started forward in her chair, terror and surprise stamped upon her face. She clasped her hands to her temples, and shrieked:

"My darling baby is in the power of Barton Leopold! He has stolen her! I know this is his work!"

Ben knew that this woman loved her child, and he meant to restore it to her. So he advanced from his place of hiding, introduced himself, and said:

"I think that I can promise to recover your child for you."

Without pausing to listen to the words of gratitude that followed, he quitted the house.

Ben had familiarized himself with all of Red Leary's habits and associates before this, for he had suspected him of complicity in the murder of Nathan for some time.

He was thus enabled to go straight to the room of a female friend of Red's, and there, as expected, he found the child, and at once restored it to its mother.

Red had no interest in keeping the child, and therefore he had not taken any pains to conceal it.

Red disappeared for a long time.

Whether he was really connected with the Nathan case or not was never clearly known, for although all the detectives engaged in the case did their best to solve the mystery of that mysterious case, who killed Nathan was never positively known.

Wade suspected that was the secret that cost Leopold his life. Red Leary was caught and brought to trial for Leopold's murder, and paid the penalty.

QUEER LAWSUITS IN VARIOUS LANDS

A FEW years ago a wounded Italian officer brought suit to obtain a decision as to the rightful ownership of a bullet extracted from his body. Both doctor and nurse claimed it, but the officer contended that it was legally his.

The judge gave his decision in favor of the officer. He found that the projectile, once discharged from the gun, ceased to belong both to the man who fired it and to the country that entrusted it to him. The officer discovered it in his body. The surgeon, assisted by the nurse, merely brought the projectile to light. Hence the officer was entitled to keep it.

When a French abbe left one village to take up work in another the Mayor and the citizens of the town he was leaving lighted a bonfire in the road to speed the departing one, and in other ways showed that they were overjoyed to see the last of him. The abbe thought himself insulted and brought an action for damages, but as he was unable to show any the case was then dismissed.

A very stout man who bought a third-class ticket at an English railway found that he could not enter the narrow doorway of a third-class compartment. Accordingly he went into a first-class compartment, the doors of which were wider, and refused to pay the excess fare. The railway company sued him for the balance, and the man had to pay both that and the costs, for the court decided that this could not have been his first offence, and that, knowing that he could not squeeze through the door of a third-class compartment, he ought to have purchased a first-class ticket.

After telling a barber to trim his beard, an American fell asleep in the chair. He woke up clean shaved. His beard, twelve inches in length, of which he was very proud, was gone. He sued the barber for $1,000 and received $100.

A Poker Lesson

By J. H. CONNELLY

THE first time I got within hailing distance of my good friend, Col. Carl Ashby—commanding the 54th Regiment—was, when I, in camp at St. Mihiel, learned he was only a few miles away. On a Saturday afternoon I got over to visit him. The officers of the 54th I found bright, jolly, well-informed fellows, as well as good soldiers, itching to get at the Germans, and that Saturday evening, with a number of them in the colonel's tent, is one of the most enjoyable memories in my overseas career, and we had some excellent singing, a little innocent card playing, much merry conversation echoed by the boom of guns on the firing line.

Sunday was cold, gloomy and rainy. At long intervals the dreary downpour would stop a little, just to gain new strength for a heavier deluge. The camp was a sea of mud. Early in the afternoon the French regimental surgeon, Dr. Werner, came into the colonel's tent. He was a fine, soldierly looking fellow, with a frank, kindly manner that won the liking of those who met him, as certainly as better acquaintance with his sterling worth inspired their respect. And as my friend, the commandant, assured me subsequently, he was one of the coolest men in the regiment under fire. We greeted him warmly. L'ombre had been played the night before and the variously shaped bits of bone used as markers in that game lay in a pile on the table by which the surgeon sat. Carelessly stirring them about with his finger, he remarked reflectively:

"I read in the paper the other day that a paymaster in Washington lost twenty thousand dollars gambling that American game poker, and blew out his brains. The money was not his, you know. He had right to pay it out to the soldiers, and as he could not replace it, of course that was all he could do. But it seems strange that a man should for such foolishness like a game of cards lose his honor and his life—don't it?"

He spoke English quite well, but necessarily with some deliberation in finding the words he wanted.

"Not particularly when it's a question of poker," replied the colonel dryly.

"You think so, colonel? Well, I do not find it that way. What is in a game of cards? Just pastime—that is all. Is it not so? And shall that cause a man to so excite himself that he lose his judgment and self-control? Me, I am sure it could not."

"Oh, it isn't the game! The game is all right. It all depends on the man."

"Well, maybe so. It must be a strange game. But it could not excite me like that."

"Did you never play poker?" I asked, in some surprise, for the idea really had never occurred to me until then that a gentleman, and especially an officer in the army, could be ignorant of poker.

"No," he answered. "L'ombre I play, and vingt-un, and sixty-six, and pinochle, but poker, no. I never even did see it."

"Oh!" I said. "This is something shameful! Such a neglected education as yours reflects discredit upon the army! Carl, we will have to teach the doctor poker."

"Most happy I shall be to learn it. Yes, I would like to know the sort of game that shall make a man lose $20,000 and blow out his brains. Sacre! That poor paymaster! What a fool he must have been."

The colonel sat up to the table. There was not in the camp, as he assured me, a poker chip, but we sorted out the L'ombre markers—square, oblong, lozenge and fish-shaped—and to each gave an imaginary value, irrespective of their colors. Then the colonel said to our pupil, "These values, you understand, are only nominal, for the purposes of play, merely; not real counters."

"Oh, no!" protested the surgeon, who had sporting blood in him. "Let it be real. That is all right. I have money, and it is only right one shall pay for learning a game. Besides, you know the beginner always has luck, and I am sure I can learn any game of cards in a few hands, so that I shall play it as well as anybody."

But we insisted that the value of the chips should be fictitious until he had acquired thorough mastery of the game, and he submitted with a polite, "Very well; as you please, gentlemen. Thank you."

The relative values of the several combinations were thoroughly explained to him, with full illustration. Then open hands were dealt, drawn to, and their respective subsequent merits as bases for financial confidence were fully set forth. Then axioms concerning betting were imparted to him. He grew a little impatient, after a while, and exclaimed: "But, yes, gentlemen; I understand it all, fully, I am not a child. And this is a child's game; it is so simple. I know it as well as if I had played it all my life. Let us begin. The teaching is enough. See, do I not know——" and he recited glibly enough the order of value of hands, from a single pair up to a straight flush, quite correctly. "There. That is all there is in it. Is it not more than strange that by so childish a game as this a man who is paymaster shall lose $20,000 and his life!"

Neither Carl nor I approved of his way of look-

ing at our national game. Our experiences had not influenced us to consider it "childish," and we said to each other, by an exchange of glances, that we would correct, emphatically, that impression in our friend's mind.

The doctor had a great run of luck. He hardly took up a hand that did not contain at least a good pair—except when he dealt, and judging from his cards, it would have appeared that the natural way for them to come out of the pack was in threes, fours, straights and flushes. Success elated and excited him. He laughed and jeered at "such a child's game."

We demurred and opined that perhaps he had not yet fully fathomed all the pure cussedness of poker, but he laughed us to scorn.

"Come!" he said; "we have played long enough for nothing. Now, to you who think so highly of your American game, a good lesson I will teach. You shall have such a good beating as never in your lives before; by me who never played it until now, but for whom any game is easy; certainly a child's game like this. Come, let us play now for money."

"As you insist upon it," assented the colonel, but he winked a negative to me and I nodded, for we certainly had no purpose of robbing our good friend, who was manifestly no more fit to play a responsible game of poker than a sheep is to run an abattoir.

The doctor's luck took a turn. He still held excellent hands, but as a rule either the colonel or myself had better ones, and if we did not, we passed out, to his intense and outspoken disappointment. There was really no necessity for monkeying with the cards to put up exasperating and instructive jobs on him. His innocently expressive countenance and unconscious physical demonstrations told what he had, as plainly as if the cards had been face up on the table. He grew more and more excited. Exposing four aces, or something almost as good, for which he had got nothing but the antes, he would wail out in a tone of grief. "Why didn't you come in? You always pass out when I get a hand like that!"

Then we inducted him, by experience, into the dread mystery of the bluff. At first it seemed to stun him. The awful audacity of betting heavily upon nothing dazed him. Directly, it seemed to his mind as simple as anything else in the game and he tried it manfully, with resultant penitence and almost despair. Then, when he had laid down three kings before, "seven high"—backed by a handful of confidently placed chips—he became enraged with his own cowardice.

All this while his excitement had been increasing in intensity. His voice, ordinarily mellow, became shrill; his hands trembled constantly; he swore, which he never did under ordinary circumstances; his English became hard to understand, and from time to time he cried out, in agony of spirit: "I don't wonder that paymaster losed $20,000 and blew out his brains by this devil's game! See! I myself would. How shall a man think a flush gets itself beat like that!"

Again and again he borrowed big stacks of chips from both the colonel and me, keeping rigid account of them on the back of a little white envelope, and I noticed that every time he touched it he seemed to tremble more. He seemed almost crazed. His eyes blazed; he shook so that he spilled a good third of his wine in carrying it to his mouth; his face was crimson, and his alternating expressions of elation and disappointment, as he looked at his cards, were as plain to read as a circus poster. The dreary day came to an end, lights were set on the table, and still the surgeon played eagerly, in evident unconsciousness of everything but the game.

"No, I don't wonder he losed his honor and his life. So I—I would lose my soul on this d——d game," he almost shrieked, in one of his frenzied outbursts over a crushing defeat on a big hand.

Suddenly he dashed down his cards, sprang to his feet, and rushed out into the darkness.

We let go the tension upon our self-control, and laughed heartily and long. He would never call it a "child's game" again. The colonel filled our glasses, lighted a fresh pipe, pushed the chips into a pile and we chatted a little while, when suddenly he, too, jumped and started to rush out.

"Where are you going?" I asked, surprised at his action.

"To look after the doctor," he replied hastily, and disappeared.

It was fully twenty minutes before he came back. When he did, he brought with him the doctor, who was shaking like a man with a palsy and seemed dazed.

"Come!" exclaimed the colonel, as he entered the tent; "the doctor will not believe that all our game was in fun. He thinks he really owes us over a thousand dollars, and he won't take my word alone for it that our game was not in earnest."

My hearty assurances, that we had merely given him a lively, but entirely inexpensive lesson, and that he did not owe either of us a cent, with some difficulty convinced him. Then his revulsion of feeling broke him all up. He gripped our hands, could only talk French for a little bit, laughed and cried, actually cried. Suddenly he rushed out again.

When he was gone, the colonel told me: "I found him in his tent, as I expected, writing a farewell letter to his wife. He had already written one to me. His pistol lay beside him. He has in Paris a wife and child of whom he is very fond, and nothing but his pay. Thinking that in his madness he had incurred a debt he could not hope to pay and had dishonored himself and those he loved, it seemed to him the only thing for him to do was to follow the paymaster's example. If I had not caught him when I did and got him straightened out about the game, I would have been short a surgeon at to-morrow's roll call."

Current News

PREHISTORIC CEMETERY FOUND.

A prehistoric graveyard believed to be at least 2,000 years old has been unearthed at Staargard, West Prussia, by German investigators under the direction of Professor Zakrzewski.

In one of the graves the excavators found six black urns and one red urn with white stripes, filled with clay and ashes.

Among the remains were some glittering substances which the investigators believe once had been adornments of prehistoric men and women.

GETS $42,500 FOR LEGS.

A jury before Supreme Court Justice Tierney of New York, gave a verdict for $42,500 to Thomas Cecil Clark, a nine-year-old boy, for the loss of both legs when he was run over by an Eighth avenue trolley car while playing ball on May 20, last.

The testimony showed that the boy, who sat on his father's lap during the trial, had withstood [illegible] operations and that his father gave by transfusion nearly two quarts of blood to save the boy's life.

SPONGE IN ABDOMEN FOURTEEN YEARS

The Journal of the American Medical Association reports the case of a young woman who had had a surgical gauze sponge in her abdomen for fourteen years. She had been operated on for appendicitis in girlhood. The gauze had been left in her abdomen. She had suffered intermittently, not suspecting the cause. When her case came under notice she had been seized with violent cramps. The abdomen was opened and the gauze pad discovered. It was in a fair state of preservation. The patient recovered rapidly.

GOOD FOR RICH AND POOR

While men of great wealth are taking advantage of the market and are buying large flocks of Liberty Bonds at the prevailing market prices, other men, of small means, are adding to their savings by the same route. A man does not need to invest a heap at any one time to get a start. He may buy a Liberty Bond, worth $50, for a price considerably under that figure, draw interest on the face value of the bond. And if he has a smaller sum to invest he can get a War Savings Stamp for $4.18 in August, and on January 1, 1925 get a $5.00 bill for it.

NOTIFIED HIS BODY IS ON WAY HOME

Although Lieut. John C. Gramstorff, a Yankee Division veteran, has notified the War Department several times that he is not dead, he received a telegram the other day at his home in Everett, Mass., announcing that his body is now on its way home from France. The telegram came from Government officials who have been told repeatedly that the Lieutenant is not dead. The officials also have held back money due the Lieutenant, apparently unwilling to believe he is alive.

Lieut. Gramstorff is at a loss to know what to do with the body, which undoubtedly is that of a wrongly identified soldier.

BOYS PLAY MOVIES; A TRAGEDY RESULTS.

A tragedy which occurred in the city of Perpignan, in the Pyrenees region, has again raised the question in France of the ill influence of moving pictures on children.

A few boys between 10 and 12 years of age were playing when one suggested that they should play moving pictures. They selected for their reproduction the hanging scene they had recently seen in a film drama. One of the little boys played the part of the man who was to be lynched. He stood on a chair and the noose was slipped around his neck. The chair fell from under his feet and he remained swinging in the air. A woman, alarmed at the cries of the frightened children, rushed to the rescue, but when she cut the rope and took the child down he was dead.

FACTS WORTH KNOWING

Geographic data for the United States, recently published by the Geological Survey, show that the gross area of the country is 3,026,789 square miles, including 53,015 square miles of water surface comprised in the Great Lakes, and the oceanic waters of the country within the three-mile limit. The southernmost point of the mainland is Cape Sable, Fla., which is 49 miles farther south than the southernmost point in Texas. The northernmost point is in Minnesota, the easternmost point is West Quoddy Head, near Eastport, Me., and the westernmost point is Cape Alva, Wash. From West Quoddy Head due west to the Pacific Ocean the country is 2,807 miles wide, while the shortest distance between the Atlantic and Pacific is 1,152 miles, between points near Charleston, S. C., and San Digeo, Cal. The curved parallels and meridians of the ordinary map projections are responsible for widespread erroneous ideas as to relative latitudes and longitudes of places. Thus few people realize that the island of Cuba, if transported due north would extend from New York City to Indiana, or that Havana is farther west than Cleveland, or that the Panama Canal is due south of Pittsburgh, or—perhaps most surprising of all—that Nome, Alaska, is farther west than Hawaii.

2,400,000 CHINESE PIGTAILS MADE INTO FILTERING CLOTH

Establishment of a carload rate on Chinese pigtails pressed into cloth from Houston, Texas, to various parts of the country, was asked of the Interstate Commerce Commission by the Oriental Manufacturing Company of Houston.

Clifford Thorne, of Chicago, representing the applicant, told the commission that the pigtails pressed into cloth were used for filtration, straining soups and similar purposes. Prior to the war European supplies of goat and camel hair were drawn on, he said, for filter purposes, but when this source was cut off the industry he represented turned to China, where the fall of the Manchu dynasty was followed by abolishment of the edict directing Chinese subjects to wear queues.

EATS TABLE CUTLERY

Miss Margaret Shayne, twenty-seven, an actress and a niece of De Wolf Hopper, died in the Hudson River State Hospital, Poughkeepsie, as a result of eating knives and spoons. Miss Shayne had been confined to the hospital for three years. Her death followed an operation for the removal of the articles. Recently she was taken seriously ill and her case was diagnosed as peritonitis but when the operation was performed the silverware was found. The physicians said they had been swallowed about two months ago.

Two nine-inch knives and three spoons, all bearing the Hudson River State Hospital mark, were found in her stomach. The operation was successful, but in cases of insanity it was stated that patients are more apt to have a serious reaction than sane persons and that such a reaction was the cause of death.

Miss Shayne, who was a promising young actress, broke down from overwork. She once appeared in "The Lion and the Mouse."

HOW ODOR TRAVELS

The rapid propagation of smells noticed in the open air appears due entirely to currents, since in small tubes, where currents do not exist, the rate is found to be very small. Experiments along this line were first undertaken in England by Prof. Ayrton, and additional data have been reported in this country.

With ammonia diffusing through a tube a meter and a half long, over two hours elapsed before the smell could be detected at the other end of the tube. Using different lengths of tubing, it was found that the time required for the diffusion of the smell was roughly proportioned to the square of the length. Ammonia and hydrogen sulphide were used for these experiments. The presence of ammonia could be detected chemically at a point in a tube after about the same time as when the sense of smell was used for a detector. The rate of propagation of the smell of ammonia was not markedly different when this had to pass along the same tube either horizontally or vertically upward or vertically downward. With camphor however, while the rates horizontally and downward were about the same, the speed upward was about twice as great. The smell given to iron and brass by rubbing these with the fingers was also tried but gave no definite results.

GLYCERINE MADE FROM SUGAR

In a recent issue of Chemical Age are to be found quotations from certain German technical papers to indicate that glycerine was produced upon a large scale from sugar in Germany beginning in 1915. Early in the war Germany had a considerable excess of sugar and the population was urged to use plenty on account of its food value. Later, however, on account of various uses found for sugar, it became scarce and people found it difficult to follow the advice given earlier.

The transformation of sugar into glycerine was accomplished by a bio-chemical method. It was known that with yeast, fermentation of sugar could be carried on in a way to convert 3 per cent. of the sugar to glycerine. By the addition of various alkalies this percentage could be increased, and sodium sulphate was found to be the best material. As much as 36 per cent. of the sugar was converted into glycerine. Acetaldehyde was also produced and was used for war purposes. The production of glycerine by this method exceeded 2,200,000 pounds a month and is, comments the Scientific American, a striking sample of the possibilities in the new fields opened through bichemical processes.

PSYCHOLOGICAL LIVING BEYOND OUR MEANS

According to the editor of the New York Medical Journal we are all fooling ourselves, living psychologically beyond our means. We are accepting without question certain standards and ideas that seem good and beautiful, but we are not trying to ascertain if they really represent the inner truth of human life and of individual human lives.

And he quotes Freud as having taught us how different this truth is from the external standards toward which we strain. We set up high standards and fool ourselves into thinking we accept them, and then they inexplicably collapse. We deny death, which comes after all. Living beyond our means!

What we need is to strip away the lies—beautiful though they be—that cover the weaknesses in individuals, in social institutions, in national and international character, and get down to the bedrock in which we shall find actual material for more genuine and lasting construction. We want to take the real measure of man, find out just what human means are and then educate ourselves and our dependents down to them.

BEST FOOD FISH

In this country the nobility of fish may be said to include pompano, shad, brook trout and imported English sole, while in the aristocratic class are kingfish, Spanish mackerel, striped bass, seabass, bluefish, chicken halibut, whitebait, smelts, Lake Champlain icefish, red snapper and salmon.

Then in the popular or middle class of fishdom come the old favorites which grace many a smart table despite the epicurean appeal of the higher priced ones—the cod, carp, eels, sheepshead, white perch, pickerel, salmon trout, tomcod, flounders, haddock, pollock, muskalonge, pike, porgies, butterfish, blackfish, ciscoes, herring and mackerel. Shellfish comes under another head, but oyster crabs, soft-shelled crabs and scallops come in with the imperial lineage, lobster, hard-shelled crabs, oysters and clams following, and mussels bring up in the rear along with crayfish.

Blackfish are sold almost exclusively to Bohemians, who have cultivated a taste for it in their native land, while on the East Side of New York alone, among Germans and Hebrews, many pounds of carp, that fish indigenous to Germany as well as to America, are consumed weekly. Tomcod, red snappers, eels and devilfish are sold to Italians in great numbers, Italians being willing to travel many miles to procure live eels, in which taste their French cousins share.

METHUSELAH OF TREES

If these is any tree in New York State that deserves an honorable mention all its own, it is the splendid old wreck of an elm at Avon, N. Y., known as the Markham Elm.

The Markham Elm reached the zenith of its glory 100 years ago, at which time it measured forty-five feet in circumference. Gradually the center of its trunk became so decayed as to be but a shell, and in 1888 there were openings on the east and west sides of the tree so large that a span of hosses could be driven through. In that year the north side was blown over. This was sawed across and 375 annual rings were counted. Estimated the distance to the center, the tree must have been considerably more than 600.

At the present time a portion of the south side of the trunk, about five feet wide and from one to three feet thick, though much decayed on one side, is supporting a top which, from the distance, shows quite a tree, although it is in reality but a single limb branching out from the trunk.

An historical sketch of the Markham Elm appeared in the Rochester "Democrat and Chronicle" in 1914. After preserting authentic records in proof of the tree's history, including the records of four generations of the family on whose homestead the elm has stood, the writer summed up with the following interesting comment: "The record places the maximum age of the American elm far above the common estimate. This tree was old when the Pilgrim fathers founded the Plymouth colony in 1620. It was in adult age when Columbus landed, in 1492.

"It was 600 years old on June 24, 1914, recalling the date on which the Scottish army, under Robert Bruce, crushed the English army, under Edward II, on the field of Bannockburn."

SHE STOLE FOR HYPNOTIST

A man who exerted a mysterious control over her was blamed by Mrs. Ruth Ruickholdt, wife of Dr. Charles Ruickholdt, of 890 Chapel street, New Haven, for her arrest on suspicion of grand larceny. Mrs. Ruickholdt was locked up in the woman's prison in Jefferson Market when she was unable to give bail of $2,500 fixed by Magistrate Max S. Levine when she was arraigned before him.

Mrs. Ruickholdt was arrested in an express office when she called for a package sent by a firm of New London, Conn., jewelers. She had ordered a costly ring and gold watch under the name of Mrs. Alfred Mitchell, of New London. Suspicion was attracted to her order, a fake package was sent and Mrs. Ruickholdt was arrested by Detective Frank Casassa as she received it.

"This man has been a curse in my life," said Mrs. Ruickholdt when she broke down in prison the other day and told detectives a story of a handsome man who had a magnetic influence over her and had brought her to her present difficulties.

She admitted getting $1,000 from Mrs. Elma Sharp, of Derby, Conn., through signing a message saying she was in New York and in trouble, with the name of Charlotte Sharp, a cousin in Boston. She told detectives the other day that she gave nearly $700 of that money to the man who had a hold upon her.

She described him as being over forty years old, six feet tall, with jet-black hair and a heavy black moustache. She said he was a fastidious dresser, handsome and athletic-looking.

"I don't love him, but he exercises a magnetic control over me. I can't explain it," she sobbed when asked for particulars of her attachment by Detective Casassa.

She said she met the man several months ago on a train between New Haven and New York. She gave the name of a man in a New England city to the police. They are inclined to doubt her narrative and believe she invented it as the only plausible explanation of the acts she has admitted to them.

Mrs. Ruickholdt cried nearly all day in prison. She was inconsolable when efforts to get bail for her were unsuccessful

She said her husband is an anaesthetist and had done very well until their finances were heavily drained by litigation. He is now living at the Hotel Raleigh, Washington, D. C., she said, and both were in need of money She denied emphatically that he had any part in her various adventures.

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The feature stories already published in this magazine are worth reading. Here are the latest numbers:

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29 "The Thirteenth Door," by Edith Sessions Tupper.
30 "The Game of Detective Carew," by L. Jerome.
31 "Law-maker and Law-breaker," by Beulah Poynter.
32 "The Counterfeit Heiress," by Inspector J. Harrigan.
33 "Tracked to China," by Chief Roger O'Brien.
34 "After the German Spies," by May Halsey Miller.
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36 "Trailed by a French Detective," by Rene Renaud.
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39 "The Stain on Page 61," by Chas. T. Jordan.
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After hair growth

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Obviously, the hair roots had not been dead, but were dormant in the scalp, awaiting the fertilizing potency of the mysterious pomade.

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MONT BLANC LOSES TOP.

The top of Mont Blanc fell off November 26 and started an enormous avalanche, which rolled down into Italy along the gorge of the Brenva Glacier, destroying in its course the whole forest of Pourtud.

The origin of the avalanche was unknown till yesterday, when the weather cleared, and a powerful telescope could be brought to bear on the mountain. Then it was found that part of the limestone pyramid which forms the summit of the greatest mountain mass in Europe had split and fallen.

The avalanche was one of the biggest and most destructive known for some time. The rock and ice tumbling from the summit dislodged immense snow fields, which in turn tore out rock, and the great mass went rumbling down the mountainside for nearly ten miles. It plunged along the glacier bed, leaped the valley of the Doire, throwing pine trees and boulders about like corks in a waterfall, and came to rest almost miraculously at the entrance to the little Italian village of Pourtud. Several houses, which stood almost in its path, were spared by a width of only a few yards, and so far no less of life has been reported.

BOYS SETTLE DISPUTE; SCHOOL-MA'AM REFEREE

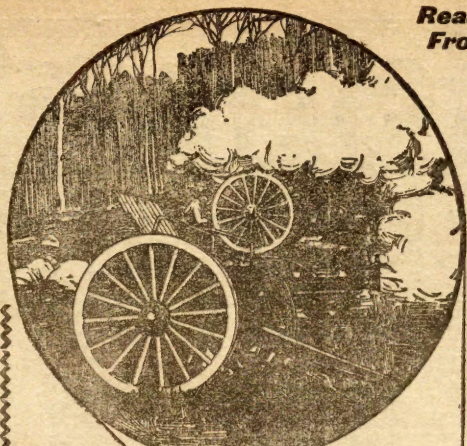
Schoolroom disputes among the boys at the Webster School in Chicago, where children of twenty-two nationalities attend classes, are not settled by arbitrary fiat of a teacher. Instead, the principal of the school, Miss Alice M. Hogge, believes in letting the boys decide their grievances with their fists, it was learned recently, and in the latest quarrel she acted as referee and second to both combatants.

It was a fight to the finish in school basement between Salvatore Sortino and Abe Selon, both aged 12. Time was called several times to enable the combatants to rest and rinse out their mouths, and after fifteen minutes Salvatore had an unquestioned decision.

"Letting the boys fight out their troubles is the best way in a school such as the Webster," said Miss Hogge. "Of course, the fights must be fair.

"I never permit any serious injuries. A black eye or two, such as Abe got, is usually the limit.

J. C. Mortensen, superintendent of schools, declared he was in favor of Miss Hogge's method, saying it is the most successful ever tried in that school.



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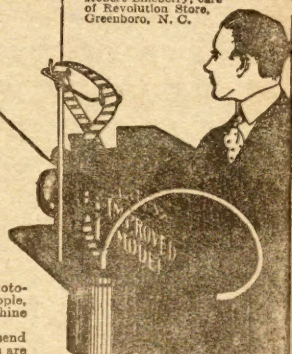

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I have been very slow in sending you an answer. I received my Moving Picture Machine a few weeks ago and I think it is a dandy, and it shows the pictures clear just as you said it would. I am very proud of it. I thank you very much for it and I am glad to have it. I gave an entertainment two days after I got it. Leopold Lamontagne, 54 Summer Ave., Central Falls, R. I.

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Some time ago I got one of your Machines and I am very much pleased with it. After working it for about a month I sold it for $10.00 to a friend of mine. He has it and entertains his family nightly. I have now decided to get another one of your machines. Michael Ehereth, Mandan, N. Dak.

Would Not Give Away for $25.00

My Moving Picture Machine is a good one and I would not give it away for $25.00. It's the best machine I ever had and I wish everybody could have one. Addie Breaky, Jeanesville, Pa. Box 34.

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I am slow about turning in my thanks to you, but my Moving Picture Machine is all right. I have had it a long time and it has not been broken yet. I have seen a $12.00 Machine but would not swap mine for it. Robert Lineberry, care of Revolution Store, Greenboro, N. C.

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This coffee costs you not one cent—not a penny. It is yours FREE, included in our great Trial Order No. 18, listed below. Read this trial order carefully—note the Standard Quality—then mail us the coupon in the lower right-hand corner, and we will send you the entire shipment, with FREE one pound package of 55c Coffee, for your examination and approval. This one trial order will prove to you the wonderful money-saving power of our gigantic, wholesale, cash-with-order system of doing business. Here—on articles you need every hour and are compelled to buy every day—

We Save You $2.02 On An Order for Only $1.98

Think of it! With the one pound of coffee, you save on one order for only $1.98, TWO DOLLARS AND TWO CENTS. How do we do it?—buying power. Get acquainted. Send for Trial Order No. 18, listed below, and we will surely convince you that from us you can get better treatment, more quantity, finer quality and lower price than anywhere else on earth.

CATALOG BARGAINS

A Few Catalog Specials

SUGAR at 3c lb. UNEEDA BISCUITS, 12 pkgs., 35c
FLOUR at $7.98 barrel. QUAKER OATS, pkg., 4c

We send our catalog of listed bargains and our great proposition of a beautiful Parlor Phonograph with six selections—Victor or Columbia Records—FREE to customers *only*. To get both, and also the FREE one pound of 55-cent coffee, send us Trial Order No. 18 listed below. Simply enclose $1.98 with coupon, or in a letter, and this great Trial Order will come to you AT ONCE. We desire to make a pleased and permanent customer of you, and guarantee you the biggest value and lowest prices, prompt service and straightforward dealing. YOU TAKE NO RISK. Examine your order when it arrives, and unless you are perfectly satisfied and pleased beyond measure and sure you have made a wonderful bargain—return goods AT OUR EXPENSE, and

EXTRA!

TO THOSE WHO SEND AT ONCE ORDER No. 18 DESCRIBED BELOW THIS WONDERFUL PROPOSITION OF A RICHLY FINISHED LATEST MODEL PHONOGRAPH WITH SIX SELECTIONS —COLUMBIA OR VICTOR RECORDS

ABSOLUTELY FREE

Trial Order No. 18

Only Sold Complete.

Money-Back Guarantee

Includes 1 lb. Coffee FREE and Wonderful

FREE PHONOGRAPH

Proposition described here.

	Value	Our Price
1 lb. coffee	$0.55	FREE
1 lb. sugar	.15	.03
1 can sardines (in olive oil)	.30	.15
1 pkg. Sa-Van (equal to about 3 doz. fresh eggs in baking and cooking	.40	.24
1 lb. baking powder	.50	.38
Face and hand lotion (for chapped hands)	1.50	.20
1 pkg. French Face Powder	.75	.46
1 tube Dental Tooth Paste	.40	.23
1 Vanilla Extract (concentrated)	.45	.29
Bargain Catalog		FREE
Phonograph Proposition		FREE
	$4.00	$1.98

Look at the Saving Figure It Yourself

You Save $2.02

Our References: Any Chicago Bank.

WE WILL REFUND ALL YOUR MONEY

FREE As the purchaser of Trial Order No. 18—you will receive one pound of Special Blend 55-cent Coffee ABSOLUTELY FREE; you will get our private list of grocery bargains; and you will also secure the great Phonograph proposition described in the headline above. Don't miss this wonderful offer. With this handsome Parlor Phonograph, including six selections—Columbia or Victor Records—you can dance, enjoy all the latest music and have endless fun and amusement. Send order No. 18 at once. Mail the convenient coupon—NOW. **This offer may not appear in this publication again.**

Trial Order Coupon No. 18

CHICAGO WHOLESALE GROCERY CO.
300 W. South Water Street, Dept. A-152 Chicago

Gentlemen:—Enclosed find $1.98, for which send me at once your trial order No. 18. With this order I am to receive special Bargain Catalog, your great Proposition of a Phonograph and six record selections and also One Pound of Special Blend Coffee—all absolutely FREE. It is understood if I am not satisfied I may return goods at your expense and you will refund my money at once.

Name .....

Address .....

Express Office .....

OUR REFERENCE: ANY BANK IN CHICAGO

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